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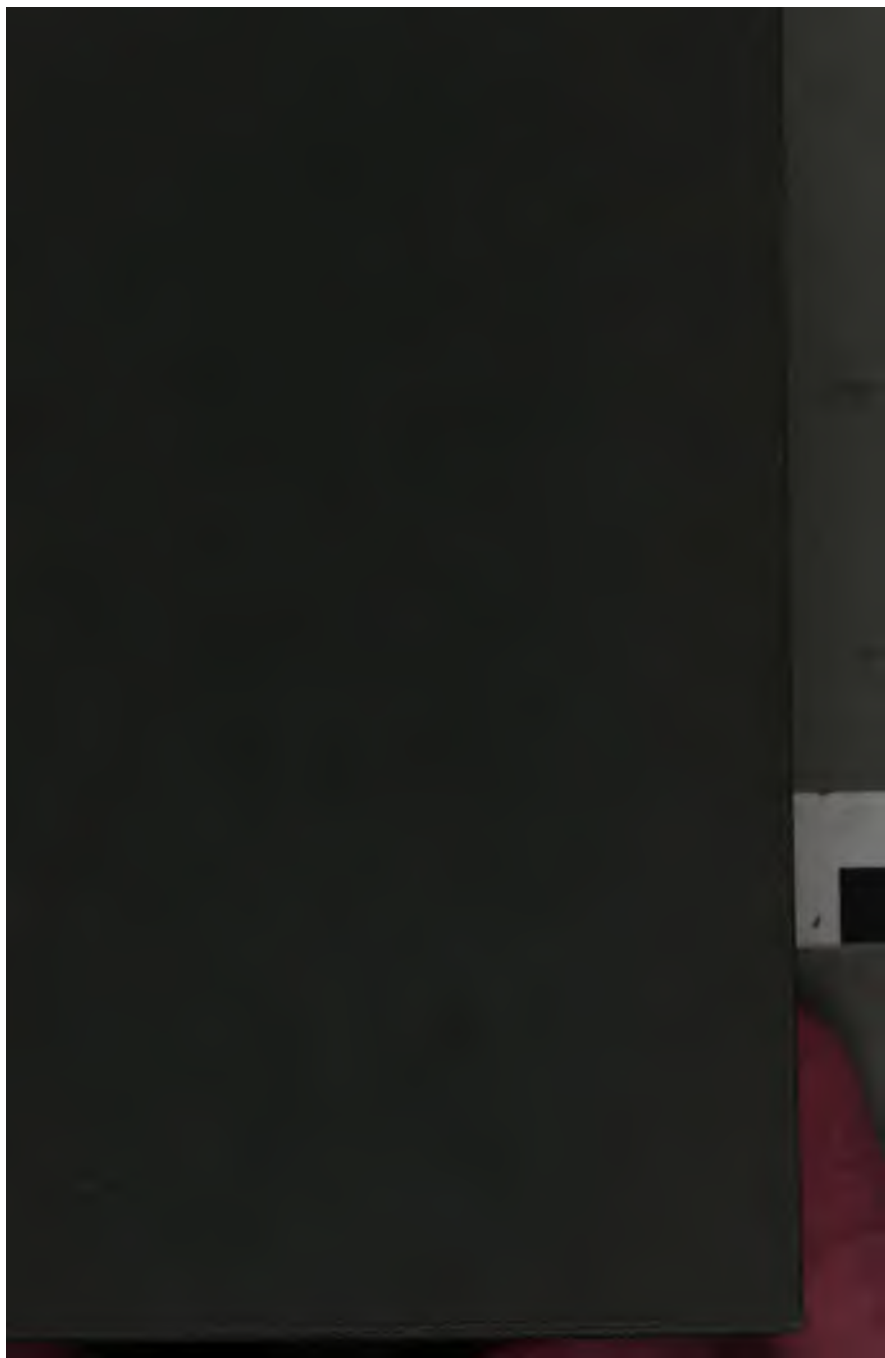
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THE BENDING OF A TWIG









WERTS ROY

Photo : J. Delta, Portia

# THE BENDING OF A TWIG

BY

DESMOND F. T. COKE

AUTHOR OF

"SANDFORD OF MERTON," "THE DOG FROM CLARKSON'S," ETC.

*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS*

*FIFTH EDITION*

LONDON

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*Fine money*

RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED,  
BREAD STREET HILL, E.C., AND  
BUNGAY, SUFFOLK.

THIS BOOK  
IS  
Dedicated  
TO  
MY HOUSE MASTER,  
TO WHOM  
I OWE ALL;  
WHOM, THEREFORE,  
I HAVE NOT ESSAYED TO PAINT  
IN MY POOR COLOURS.

## BY WAY OF EXPLANATION

Books have no more right to sub-titles than to prefaces. If this book had a sub-title, it would run, not "A Story of Shrewsbury Life," but "A Story and a Criticism." Its modest aim is, in fact, to level destructive satire at the conventional school story, and on its ruins to erect a structure rather nearer to real life.

With this last end in view, it seemed to me wiser to take as background a school which I both knew and loved: and having taken it, to call it Shrewsbury, not Harbury or Shrewsrow. At the same time, all its persons are imagined.

It may seem to abstract criticism that the change of tone between the First Part and the Third is an artistic blunder: and I may perhaps be allowed (having once braved a preface) to point out that it is at least based on a theory, and is intended to show the change from the new boy's irresponsibility to the monitor's fresh sense of duty. No story, it seems to me, which is consistently gay or doggedly grave throughout, can possibly describe school life.

DESMOND F. T. COKE

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PART THE FIRST  
ILLUSION





# THE BENDING OF A TWIG

## CHAPTER I

### POETIC JUSTICE

THOMAS MARSH was the last man who should have been a poet. The clear-cut face and large lustrous eyes that betray the bard were not for him. He showed his calling only by a certain fatuity of speech, by a bold, if not rash, taste in ties, and by a vagueness which, especially in the presence of a bore, amounted almost to ignorance of his surroundings. Apart from this, one would never have suspected that Thomas Marsh was a poet. Some critics said that he was not.

Mrs. Marsh, too, although deeply sentimental, was not that airy creature, clad in floating scarves from Liberty, who buzzes round the poet's work-room in the pages of Romance. She was plump, good-natured, domestic, sternly practical in dress, and had never stepped across the threshold of the Stage Society.

The parents must explain the son. Lycidas

Marsh (his father chose the Christian name), embarrassed by his mother's aimless adulation, had been left by his father to make his own way; and, being naturally weak, had not progressed much in the task. Mr. Marsh had not thought fit to send him to a private school: he liked to see the boy about. Often, after watching him capering upon the flower beds, he would go in and write an ode to Youth. At other times he would go in and fetch a cane.

Lycidas grew to the age of twelve, with a profound ignorance of the world, a suspicion of his father's inconsistency, and an intense belief in all the nice things that his mother said about him. He imagined that there must be other boys of his own age—indeed, he sometimes saw them, while walking staidly with his mother—but it was obvious to him that he was of a superior quality to these foolish creatures who ran about with shrieks, or leapt over each other's bent backs. From what his mother said, he was clearly fated to do great things. Now and then, with something of his father's vagueness, he wondered when the first great thing was due.

He was busy with this speculation on the afternoon of his thirteenth birthday, and *The Lives of the Poets*, his father's birthday gift, had fallen from his sleepy fingers. From across the room the voices of his parents drifted to his

ears. He suddenly realized that they were discussing him. His interest quickened.

"No, not Art," his father was saying. "No son of mine shall take up Art. Art is thankless—and the result? Mine, after all, Adeline, has been a useless life."

Self-depreciation was a form of vanity with Thomas Marsh. It seldom failed to draw a compliment.

"Useless! Oh, my *dear!*" cried his wife, as one who is shocked.

"Yes, my dear: but action, not thought, is life. I often think I should thank any one as a benefactor, who would burn all my poetry, and make me dig. I am resolved that Lycidas——"

"Hush," whispered Mrs. Marsh, after a quick glance; "he is listening."

Lycidas had indeed been listening, raptly, fervently, as one who hears a revelation. He had often been puzzled by his father's moroseness; had wondered why one day he was fondled, and another caned, all for the single act of sporting among the geraniums. At times his father had seemed almost prostrate, when he opened small green envelopes, with cuttings from newspapers in them. He had wondered, dumbly.

Now he knew the truth. His father wanted only one small thing. A small thing! His

father! Could he hesitate? His father only wished his poems burnt. What simpler? He would thank as a benefactor any one who would burn his poems, and make him dig. Lycidas was not sure that he could make him dig: but burn his poems? Yes! Perhaps this was the first "great thing" of his life. Certainly it was not nothing, to benefit his father! Not every boy could do it.

He waited patiently until his parents had gone down to dinner; then, nerved by his grand purpose, he walked boldly into that forbidden place, the poet's sanctum. A fire was crackling merrily, as befits March in Yorkshire, and the great table was strewn with heaps of paper, some loose, some in ordered piles. Everything was ready for the sacrifice, and Lycidas strode up to the victims. Two especially large bundles drew his gaze. These seemed finished poems: the others were mere single pages, scattered notes. It was these that weighed upon his father's mind, these that made him beat his son unjustly for playing prettily upon the flower beds. He would burn them.

On the top of one was written, "ENGLAND, LAND OF FOAM, ARISE: A Patriotic Cry, by Thomas Marsh"; on the other was, "THE YEAR HATH MANY DAYS: An Epic Cycle."

Of this last, Lycidas bunched the topmost

sheets, marked *IANUARIUS*, in his hand, and cast them on the blazing fire. As the flame died down, before the furnace could grow black again, he threw another month upon it, varied at intervals by parts of the Patriotic Cry.

The scene was rather picturesque. Lycidas was slimly made, and in the fire-glow his pale, excited face showed clear above the suit of black velvet, which it was his doom to wear. From behind, his figure made a graceful silhouette against the fire-light, and as he stooped to scatter further sheets upon the leaping flames, he seemed like some youthful spirit from the Past, caught in an evil incantation.

This æsthetic side, however, failed to strike the Poet, who, attracted by the smell of burning, stood within the doorway, as the last of the Year's Many Days went flaring up the chimney. In this moment of stress, his words, his actions, were not of the poet. He dashed at Lycidas, and shook him unromantically.

"What have you done, you little idiot?" he cried.

"What is it, Thomas?" said his wife, as she ran up. "Remember, it's his birthday!"

"Is that a reason, Adeline, why he should burn *England, Land of Foam* and all the *Year*? Oh, Adeline, Adeline," he cried, releasing Lycidas, "this is a bitter moment—the labour of long

years . . . my ladder to Fame . . . . and the only copy!" He put his head between his hands.

Lycidas was puzzled. His father seemed to have forgotten.

"You know, father," he began, "you—you said you'd thank any one who—so I burnt them. Now—now you can dig."

Suddenly his father turned upon him, strangely excited.

"Either you're the silliest litt— Oh, I can't talk to you now. Go up to your room, this instant, sir."

Mrs. Marsh moved forward. "Thomas, it's his birthday."

"Birthday or not, up he goes. Go at once, sir; do you hear me? Don't let me speak to you again. Unless your mother persuades me, I shall come and see you, when you're undressed."

Certainly, Lycidas thought, his father had a strange way of thanking benefactors: why he seemed quite angry! Perhaps he had not burnt the proper poems.

As he slowly climbed upstairs, ruminating once more upon a poet's inconsistency, his parents were discussing him below.

"He meant well, Thomas," Mrs. Marsh kept saying. "He overheard your words. The boy is a good boy."

"The boy's a fool, Adeline."

"He is your son," was the unfortunate reply, explained hastily by the adding of, "you shouldn't speak of him like that."

"I deserve it, I deserve it," said the poet, after a short silence. "I am too poetical to be a father. I haven't educated him—merely let him grow. He's got no sense at all, believes everything he hears. The boy's a fool, Adeline, and it's our fault. He should have been packed off to school, long ago: he'd pick up sense there."

"*School, Thomas!*" cried Mrs. Marsh, as one might mention death.

"School, Adeline. I was at school, eight years in all, and they turned me out sensible. Yes, Adeline," he added, with a new geniality, soothed by reminiscence, "that was before I met you! It was Oxford that made me a poet. School left me practical, and, as I said to-day, Lycidas shall *do* something; he shall not dream. I've dreamed. And yet, Adeline,—it's been a pleasant dream."

He fell into a peaceful retrospect, which presently found fruit in words. "Yes, perhaps after all, I would not grudge Lycidas to Art, if I thought he would be as happy as I've been, and would be an artist. But he won't, my dear, he won't. To burn my poems! . . . ."

"It was a poet's notion, though," said his wife, innocently.



"A poet's notion, to burn my poetry. Why——"

She broke in upon his anger. "No, no, dear! You misunderstand me. It was a vandal's work, dear; but to burn them was a poet's idea. Many men would have torn them up—I mean, dear, if they'd *had* to destroy them. It was a lovely sight. I should have liked a photo of it."

"Lycidas will never make a poet, dear. In any case, he must go to school: we can have him here no longer."

"If you're resolved, Thomas, and he must really go, there is a school in Long Lane, down the road."

"Bah!" cried the author of *England, Land of Foam, Arise*, in his best jingoistic strain. "Lycidas is a British boy; he shall go to a British school."

"Surely, Thomas, any school in Yorkshire would be a British school?"

"My dear, I do not mean a village school: I mean one of the great British Public Schools. There, Lycidas will have to look after himself,—no coming home to cry to you; he'll learn self-reliance there."

"You mean Eton or Harrow, dear?" She still spoke in bated tones of horror.

"I mean any of the Public Schools—Eton and Harrow are two. Splendid traditions—but too

near London, Adeline. Ahem, let me see, then there's—well, where's an almanack? We shall find them all in there. There were seven, I believe, in the Public Schools Act—and some good new ones since. But I believe in traditions.”

Mr. Marsh, during these remarks, was running through the pages of the almanack. His wife watched him, in misery.

“Oh, I could never let Lycidas go—never,” she cried: then, fearing that he might not have heard, “no, never!”

Certainly, he took no notice, as he turned the leaves. “Ah, here: yes, here it is. Eton, Harrow, Winchester, Shrewsbury, Charterhouse, Rugby and Westminster. Lycidas shall go to one of those.”

For some minutes he stood, book in hand, thinking almost aloud. Mrs. Marsh, from time to time, caught various names, sign-posts of the great man's thoughts: and she never ceased from crying, plaintively, “Oh, I could never let him go.”

“All in a hole, all—like the 'Varsities—down in a hole,” said Thomas Marsh, with startling suddenness and doubtful accuracy: and then fell back to silence. “Yes, my dear,” he began, presently, “if Harrow is too near London, Lycidas must go to a low-lying school.”

“He would die, Thomas, he would die. Low

ground, and nobody to tie flannel round the dear ! Oh, I could never let him go. It would be murder, Thomas."

Silence once again for several instants : then, as before, the poet suddenly broke into speech.

"Shrewsbury !" he cried, "Shrewsbury !" so loudly as to startle her. "I forgot, my dear. Shrewsbury's no longer in a hole : it's moved. It's on a hill, towering above town and river. Hill ? Why Harrow's is a mole-heap by it. Adeline, you're right. Shrewsbury is the place for Lycidas. He shall not be in the valley."

"But——," began his wife, burning with protests against Lycidas going at all.

He solemnly held up a hand. "No buts, dear. You shall have your way. Lycidas shall have a hill. He will enjoy all the traditions of an old school, but all the advantages of a new building. Along with his practical training, he will gain a poet's soul. Fair sights and scenes shall lead him up, and he shall build the temple of his Self by the cool freshness of the Severn's streams . . . ." Thomas Marsh gazed raptly into space.

"Seven streams !" his wife broke in. "Oh, damp and horrid ! Thomas, could not Lycidas——"

"Enough, Adeline. Leave the rest to me,

and do not worry. It's all very fitting, that one named Lycidas should be by 'Sabrina fair, under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,'—so pregnant with memories of Milton. I will enter his name. Do not worry me further with it, Adeline. Let it be enough to have gained your point."

With these last words he closed the door. An ignorant observer would never have guessed, from Mrs. Marsh's attitude, that she had gained her point. She sat, in seeming misery, for several minutes; then arose and tiptoed quietly to her son's room. Arrived there, she gave no explanation of her conduct, but smothered Lycidas under such a storm of tears and kisses, that he grew embarrassed, and after much thought could only interpret them as pent-up gratitude for the burning of *England, Land of Foam, Arise*.

When, some months later, he learnt the truth, and was told to work for his entrance examination, his emotions were indefinite. Chief among them, however, was a feeling that the larger life would give greater scope for the display of his cleverness; and though he would miss the admiration of his mother, he might find recompense in that of, possibly, three hundred boys. Home life, he had decided since the bonfire episode, gave little chance for performance of

heroic actions. On the whole, he welcomed the change.

Fate seemed eager to witness the comedy, for a vacancy offered itself almost immediately: Lycidas might be a Salopian in the winter term, if he could pass the entrance test.

He was a little disappointed by the attitude of his fellow-candidates at this function. They seemed almost to ignore him. They appeared, however, to be much struck by his nice black velvet suit, bought by his mother specially for this occasion. They did not ask his name: they called him, when they spoke at all, Lord Fauntleroy. They mouthed it with great pomp. Lycidas was entertained by their mistake: but it was something that they should take him for a nobleman.

On the whole, if he had an uneasy suspicion that he had filled a humble part during those days, he reflected that he had had little chance to show his gifts, except in the examination. Before he left the Schools, his future house-master took him round to the examiner, and was practically assured that he had passed.

When official notice came, his mother was delighted. In her pride at this, she almost buried all her fears. Almost, yet not quite: for though she was far from blind to her son's merits, she also saw that he was not quite like other

boys. He was, of course, better ; but would the others realize the fact ? Would they be jealous ? She woke at night and lay worrying her mother's heart, remembering that Lycidas had never come in touch with any one of his own age.

As week drew into month, she cast about, wondering how she might prepare him. All the boys of thirteen years were away at school. Perhaps in the summer holidays Lycidas, who had hitherto refused, might be induced to meet them.

Meanwhile, a stray advertisement of *A Realistic Tale of Public School Existence* shook a brilliant idea into her brain. She would give Lycidas the experience of master-minds. Fearing delay, she hurried on her hat and cloak. Twenty minutes found her in the sole bookshop of the little country town of Nofield.

"I want," she said to the young man at the counter, "the cheapest edition—sixpenny, if possible—of all the standard school books you possess."

"Classics, mam, or Mathematics ?" The shopman had a reputation for intelligence.

"No, no ! *Tom Brown—Eric*—anything of that sort."

"Oh, yes, mam. I quite understand. We have both those at four-three. Kipling's *Stalky and Co.*, from the Library, very slightly soiled, one shilling."

“Is that realistic?” asked Mrs. Marsh.

“Most rousing, mam,” answered the shopman, who had never read it. “There is also a new book, mam, very highly recommended—of Harrow life—*The Hill*.” (Things are new for years in Nofield.)

He called it *The Ill*; but Mrs. Marsh divined. “What price is that?”

“That we can do, mam, at four-and-sixpence, cash.”

Mrs. Marsh reflected: it was a lot of money. Still the book was up-to-date; and Shrewsbury, too, was on a hill. Perhaps that gave the two establishments more in common. She resolved to let him “do it” at four-and-sixpence, cash. She left the shop, hugging the four volumes.

The road that leads to the poet’s rural home is thinly scattered with small shops, displaying, mainly, bright-hued bull’s-eyes and other sweetmeats of a by-gone age. One of these had, in its old paned window, on this morning, certain penny booklets largely devoted to the doings of one Deadwood Dick. But among these Mrs. Marsh’s eye caught a cover whereon a schoolmaster, in cap and gown, was being laid low by a massive pink pig, driven between his portly legs by a mischievous pupil of his school. This cover was inscribed, *Jack Joker, or A Real*

*Good Time: A Rollicking Tale of Real Life, Mystery, and Fun at School.* She felt that she must have this book: it said "Real Life." Nothing but maternal love could have borne her through the portals of the shop, whence a mingled scent of boiled sweets, onions, and tallow candles struck her nostrils. But that great love will conquer anything: she boldly entered.

A rakish-looking boy, of perhaps fifteen years, was sitting, half upon the counter, half upon a side of bacon. As she entered, he raised his eyes from one of the Deadwood Dick romances, and without getting up or even removing his cap, remarkably impatiently, "Well, mum?"

"I want *Jack Joker*," answered Mrs. Marsh, with a vast shame.

"Well, 'e ain't 'ere." After which reply, the lank youth entered once more into communion with the enterprising Dick.

She stood, horror-struck and wondering what to say. Presently, the boy looked up again, as if surprised to find her there. "E ain't 'ere, mum, no kid. Only me and my old muvver's 'ere."

"Boy," said Mrs. Marsh, majestically, "you misunderstand me. I want *A Real Good Time*."

"Ye can't get it 'ere, mum," the lad answered sympathetically, and with a new respect. "I



don't know no Jack Joker, and I'm bound to stay 'ere an' mind the shop."

Mrs. Marsh's very aigrette uprose in wrath and dignity. For her son's sake, however, she would not give in.

"Unless you want me to call your mother," she said with a violence strange to her, "you'll give me that school story from the window, and say no more, boy."

"Ow!" remarked the boy, as he unhooked the booklet, and handed it, unwrapped, across the counter. She hid its lurid face rapidly behind the blameless *Eric*, and stepped haughtily—but with a cautious glance—into the street.

"And it is among such creatures," she said, paying an unwitting tribute to the Board School, "that my poor, tender Lycidas must go!"

## CHAPTER II

### A NEW USE FOR FICTION

IT was a proud, a happy moment for Lycidas when his mother gave him the collection of school stories. Hitherto his reading had been mainly confined to books bearing the mystic impress, S.P.C.K., and though he had no idea of the meaning of these letters, he had begun to suspect that the books themselves were somewhat monotonous as to their moral. He skimmed rapidly through the five new volumes and decided to begin upon *Stalky and Co.* A tempting passage caught his eye, and in the next moment his decision was fixed by the reflection that if his mother read that passage, she might think the book too exciting for his tender years. (Lycidas already owned the elements of male scorn for female prejudice.) Of *Eric* he was painfully suspicious; it seemed to have a well-known ring. He turned it over and about, searching for the meaningless initials. Then he put it by, and set himself to read of *Stalky*.

The impression made on Lycidas Marsh by this most strenuous of stories can only be compared with that made on Keats when he first looked into Chapman's Homer. He felt "like some watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken." It was, indeed, more wonderful than this. The very world had changed its hue ; by the magic of a printed page he found his whole views of school existence altered. The language, the behaviour, of the boys was all so different from what he had pictured. His ideal portrait of school life had been built, laboriously, bit by bit, from his former reading. He had imagined himself supreme among his fellows by the mere force of moral endeavour and of Christian patience, never countenancing wrong, and always with a ready word of encouragement for those to whom virtue came less easily. But now he saw that his supremacy (and it is to be noted, that of this he felt no doubt whatever) must be based on a more active policy. Would he be equal to it ?

He read on with a growing, yet delicious, fear. In four short weeks he would find himself in the very midst of this, of the reality of what he read ! How to thank his mother enough for having bought *Stalky and Co.* ? It taught him such a lot of things.

*He had* never suspected, for example, that

boys would talk like this. They used words, phrases, which he had never heard, at the meaning of which he could but guess. What was a "pestiferous stinkadore"? He had never heard his father, probably the cleverest of men, allude to it; yet Stalky knew! In his mother's highest moments of delight and pride in him, she had never cried, "Come to my arms, my beamish boy. Oh, frabjous day! Calloo, callay!" He still remembered his father's elation one day, when he had waved a long strip of crackling paper before them at breakfast, and cried, "This is indeed a proud moment for me, Adeline. The fruits of my Muse!" but he had not spun upon his heel, and cried, "Fids! fids! Oh, fids! I gloat. Hear me gloat!" No, the ways of parents were clearly other than the ways of Public School boys. How lucky that he had found out in time!

The strangeness of these last ways was more and more borne in upon him. He had been taught at home that smoking, slang, and spitting were three vices. True, his father indulged in the first, which, if it was a vice, bewildered him; but he had never known him guilty of the others. Yet Stalky and his friends indulged in all, and as Lycidas read, his admiration looming large for these young boys who practically ruled the school, he saw that all their ways were right. He must

practise these accomplishments. Smoking, in particular, seemed most desirable. Did not the head master smoke cigars in the prefect's room? Did not the chaplain smoke a friendly pipe in Stalky's study?

It has been said, probably, that every human is at heart a brute. As Lycidas, the gentle, lamblike Lycidas, read the pleasing tale of *The Moral Reformers*, the animal instinct doubtless surged over him. He was for all purposes a savage: the lust of cruelty sent the blood drumming round his temples. He read of how Stalky and Co. trapped the bullies, of how they gagged them and gave the younger the varied tortures of head-knuckles, brush-drill, the key, corkscrews, and rocking to sleep; of how they singed and shaved the elder, beating him playfully with a stump upon the instep—and elsewhere, until at the end the two could not stand for several minutes (all with the sanction of the chaplain); and as he read, he tingled pleasantly. His foot beat up and down, he had much ado not to shout, "Go it, Stalky!" Thus and thus would he treat his enemies at school! It was a new Lycidas that the genius of a writer, helped—the pedant would insert—by atavism, had created.

Suddenly, a ghastly fear struck in on him. This was magnificent, but—would he be the beater or the beaten? Might it not be that a

second Stalky would arise and do the same to *him*? What of the years while he was small and physically weak? Must he endure the torture of the gag and corkscrews? Moved by a thoughtless impulse of his older self, he asked his mother.

It was the end.

Mrs. Marsh glanced at the chapter, shut the book, and locked it in her writing-desk.

“Forget everything that you have read there, my boy,” she said, “I am sure it is untrue. School *can* not” (she spoke strongly, to convince herself)—“*can* not be so horrible, so rough, so brutal. I consider that these boys are most ungentlemanly in their behaviour. Forget all about them, dear, and start on *Eric*. I know *that* is pretty.”

Lycidas started on the pretty *Eric*, but did not forget the brutal *Stalky*. He had never before realized that beside the supremacy of goodness and of intellect might stand the supremacy of muscle. Did it not even stand above it? Yes, if he were to do great things, he must be as Stalky. Must and would! He would smoke, spit, poach, and swear; he would excel in shirking games, in cheeking masters; he would pawn other boys' Sunday trousers and gift watches; he would taunt a rival house with stinking; he would surpass the *trio*, ~~yes~~ their very leader, in their

actual exploits! He would be a second, but a greater Stalky!

For days these wild ambitions ran riot in his brain, and he made slow advance in *Eric*. But gradually the calm phrases of the author did their soothing work: Lycidas began to see that Stalky, his late hero, was in effect no better than the baser boys in *Eric*. He began to wonder how he had ever imagined himself to be a Stalky in the making. His whole life, he saw, had been fitting him for the rôle of Eric. As he read the story with growing interest, he insensibly fancied himself as its chief figure, or sometimes as his great friend, Russell.

It was the encounters of this last with the school bully (this personage was obviously a fixture in every school) that first roused his enthusiasm. Poor Eric, to be called "a bump-tious young owl," and to be given a "smart slap" for his "conceit in laughing" when the bully had been caned! Lycidas wondered, would he too be called these awful names and suffer this indignity? No! He would be like Russell: he would come up and say, fiercely, "Shame! What a fellow you are, Barker."

Or if it should be his fate to be the bullied Eric, he would imitate that worthy by turning upon his tormentor with insulting words.

What a flow of effective abuse Eric had owned!

Blackguard—hulking, stupid, cowardly, bully—despicable bully—intolerable brute. Lycidas underlined all those words with a blue pencil: he would certainly remember them. He almost hankered to be bullied.

But it would be even more charming to be Russell, Russell who came up and called the big boy a confounded bully, and threatened never to speak to him again; who remained undaunted even when called “puppy,” and dealt the bully a swinging blow on the face.

Yes, Russell was the best one to be. He would model himself upon him, too, in his hatred of cribbing. With him he would say, “I don’t deign to crib. It isn’t fair.” But apparently he must not help the masters by calling their attention to the cribbing of others: that seemed to be sneaking, and a shocking fault. He must shield his fellows. But what if he got six cuts with a cane for it, and “for some weeks there were dark weals visible across his palm, which rendered the use of his hands painful”? Why, Eric seemed sufficiently rewarded when a schoolfellow said, “Poor Williams, how very plucky of you not to cry.” It was no small thing to be a martyr.

As he read on, he became increasingly sure that he was made to be Russell and not Eric. Eric fell away into amazing vices, whilst Russell always tried to keep him straight.



It came as a terrific shock, to find that Russell died before the book had reached its middle. He died happily, pathetically, beautifully—but—well, was it worth it? “Whom the gods love, die young,” he saw at the top of a page, as he toyed meditatively with the volume. Then wasn’t it better to be hated by the gods?

Did he really care to be Russell, any longer; that was what he asked himself. Would he rather be the vicious Eric, and keep alive? Was it worth one’s while to keep free from cribbing and the other sins, if one was to be cut off by the sea and drowned? . . .

Still, after all, there was no sea at Shrewsbury!

Yet *Eric* seemed to drag, now that Russell was no more. There was no one who said such lovely things, no one who quoted the poets so appropriately, no one half so pious!

When Eric’s innocent young brother died, Lycidas was strengthened in his theory. The two really pious boys had passed away: even apart from the page-title, “Whom the gods love, die young,” he could not doubt the meaning. The vicious twelve-year-old Wildney who drank brandy and “black bottles of wine,” who smoked pipes and cigars, who led the “Anti-Muffs,” showed no symptoms of dying. Even Eric, who was half-and-half, survived. Yes, he would be a second Wildney, not a second Russell!

And suddenly all his theories went hurtling down in ruin.

He realized, in an awful moment, that the author had meant Wildney for an evil influence, that the moral of the book was all against him. Ghastly thought! What had been meant to shock had entertained! Was he, then, beyond all hope already?

Lycidas, already staggered by the recognition of his error, was left gaping at the death of Eric. Eric the once virtuous, driven into a corner by the fruits of sin, had run away to sea, had suffered hardships, had come home to die in forgiveness, comfort, penitence, and peace. Lycidas found great tears rolling down his cheeks.

But what did it all mean? He liked the first bit best, he did not understand this end. Russell and Eric's brother had died young, because the gods loved them. He quite saw that. But why had Eric died?

Was it because the gods did not hate him enough? Would he have lived, if he had been a bit more wicked? Had he died as soon as he repented?

The boy's gropings after moral truth are far more poignant than the philosophic quibblings of the full-grown man; Lycidas was genuinely puzzled. In his bewilderment, he turned once more to his mother.

"Why do all the boys die, Mum?" he asked. "Boys don't often die at school, do they?"

"No, dearest, very seldom," answered the mother, with who shall say what vague fears gnawing at her heart.

"Then why did these three die?" persisted Lycidas. He was still not much more than a baby, for all his thirteen years.

Mrs. Marsh hesitated. "It's a long time since I read the book, dear: I don't quite remember. But it surely must say? You've only just finished it, so *you* ought to know!"

Lycidas kept silent for a minute, then his difficulty blurted itself out. "Mum, dear, was it—was it because they were too good?"

"Too good!" In her anxiety she dropped the flowers which she was arranging. "Why, whoever gave you that ridiculous idea?"

"I—I got it from *Eric*, Mum. None of the Anti-Muffs died, did they? So I thought only the good, and the half-good ones like *Eric*, died."

Mrs. Marsh came to her son's side and laid a hand lovingly upon his head. "My dearest boy," she said, "goodness and badness don't affect death: only, the good are happy after death, and the wicked not. But you mustn't worry about such things. Boys shouldn't think *too* much about death."

"Then why," asked Lycidas, "do men write books for boys about it?"

His elder employed the ruse adopted by countless elders in the face of Youth's unanswerable enigmas: she evaded the real issue. "Try to forget it, darling boy: God send that your school-days will have nothing to do with death. Read something more cheerful. Why, you've not begun *Tom Brown* yet: that's the prettiest of all."

Lycidas was puzzled. He was to forget Stalky's friends, because they were brutal: he was to forget Eric's, because they died. Why would he have to forget Tom Brown's?

The worst of it was—and he felt wicked in confessing it—he knew that he would not forget. He might forget the deaths, because they seemed dull: but he would certainly not forget Stalky's habits or Russell's piety. Both were stored up: he was not quite certain which should be his model. Time would show. Meanwhile, he might learn still more of school life, were that possible, by reading *Tom Brown*.

When he had finished it, he concluded that there was literally no more for him to learn. He had been strengthened in sundry theories, as, for instance, the prevalence of drinking ("cocktail" was a word quite new to him), and of bullying. He was, by now, beyond surprise that Tom should

distinguish himself, on his first day, at football, and that he should better, at fighting, a man larger than himself : these things seemed to him merely normal. He was confirmed in one very pleasant discovery, which as he read *Eric* had come to him as a surprise. From his father's remarks, as well as from his own small experience, he had always imagined that the talk of boys, who had not been so much with grown-ups as himself, was trivial in the extreme, and Stalky had only served to strengthen this opinion. But in *Eric* he had been charmed with the gentle conversation of the boys, aptly illustrated by occasional quotations from the poets, and had even—on the *omne ignotum* principle—delighted in their use of Greek. And now he found Tom and his friends talking soberly on many points. Indeed, there was one discussion on Naaman and compromise which, read as he might, he could not understand. This was upsetting : could it be that the conversation of these boys would be above him ? In order to be safe, Lycidas committed the whole argument to memory. They should at least not find him at a loss, if in the dormitories the talk should turn on Naaman and compromise !

But for the rest, he skimmed as quickly as he could through *Tom Brown*, which seemed so *often* to get strangely like the Vicar's sermons

or the books with S.P.C.K. upon their backs. Besides, he had his eye upon *Jack Joker*, which seemed a far better book. Was it not *A Rollicking Tale of Real Life, Mystery, and Fun at School?* That certainly did not apply to this *Tom Brown*.

But here disappointment lay in wait again. Lycidas enjoyed with growing relish the opening chapters, in which Jack arrived (having in the train assaulted the head master by smashing in his hat), straightway defeated the inevitable school bully, and was elected "cock of the school." His interest grew, when it became clear that mystery (as promised on the cover) loomed large at Bircham College. Why did the head master tremble when the window creaked; why shiver, when Jack Joker mentioned "Whitechapel"? These were problems to be solved. It soon began to be obvious that Mons. Froggi, the French master, was also something of a villain. Why, otherwise, did he crawl by night to the old ruined mill? Why, otherwise, was the Duke of Dalborth's son missing, next morning, from the Lower School?

This was a new light on masters. Lycidas, by his former reading, had been left doubtful whether the masters stood to boys as sworn foes, or as sentimental friends. It had never occurred to him that they should be criminals:

even Stalky had not charged Mr. Prout with murder. But did it not look as though Mons. Froggi were a villain? Might it not be so at Shrewsbury?

Slow to learn wisdom, quick to utter questions, he went to his mother, with the old result—*Jack Joker* vanished into the locked writing-desk.

Mrs. Marsh, simple soul, was deeply worried. She had glanced at the end, and had assured herself that not only was Mons. Froggi an insensate Nihilist, but the head master himself was no one less than Jack the Ripper.

Utter scepticism was her first emotion. Then she glanced at the cover, where flamed the words, "*A Rollicking Tale of Real Life.*" Could it be? If it had been, might it not be yet again? Surely it could not be. Yet—well, what harm in making certain?

She sat down, and wrote to a cousin, who had had long experience of Public Schools as boy and master.

"MY DEAR DICK,—Lycidas has gained his entry into Shrewsbury Public School, and we are of course proud of him, but as you may imagine it is an anxious moment for his mother. The dear boy is *very* plucky about it and keeps his spirits up wonderfully and I have given him several school stories so that he shall at least

know what is *done* in those places. But one of them which is described as a tale of *real life*, has given me a great shock. Of course one knows how brutal the boys are, but surely one can trust to the *masters* being human can't one? In this book, which I don't think is very well-known and it's only in a paper edition, the French master proves to be a Nihilist and the head master an awful murderer. Please tell me *truly*, Dick, whether there has ever been such a case, as I know what rubbish some authors write but if this had ever been I don't think I could bear to let my darling Lycidas go among them. So answer soon. Your worried, but affectionate,  
ADELINE."

Mrs. Marsh did not show this letter to her husband, nor did she consult him in her difficulty: she had noticed that he was always opposed to her doing anything—unless she had not done it. She hid her trouble, and waited for her cousin's answer. Dick was something of a humorist, and this is how it ran:—

"MY DEAR ADELINE,—Delighted, of course, to help at any time. You do not tell me the name of the masterpiece and I fail to recognize it; but I should not put your trust in school stories. They are mainly written with the express purpose of harrowing fond parents. School life is really desperately dull, and a death or two is almost essential, to make a story from



it: but murders in actual school life are very rare, quite the exception. Indeed, during twenty years' experience, I am not sure that I remember *one*. As to Shrewsbury (and I'm glad Lycidas goes there), one cannot of course be certain of anybody's antecedents: but I should think the probability is against any of the masters being criminals. It is, in fact, quite improbable that the head master of any Public School should be an awful murderer. The qualifications for the two professions are altogether different.

"Do not be 'worried,' but remain 'affectionate.' Almost before you want him, the boy will be back from his first term, the same as ever but for a few bruises and a large bump of conceit. I pity you: he will despise all things not Salopian! Write again, if I can help. Affectionately,  
DICK."

The letter comforted her somewhat, though she could not but observe that cousin Dick had not ventured to assert the utter impossibility of such villainy: he had only declared it to be quite improbable. Still that must serve. She told Lycidas to forget all about the Nihilistic Frenchman and the murderous head master: he had better start *The Hill*. About the bruises she said nothing, but brooded on them in her mother's mind. Her gentle Lycidas! O, why were other boys such brutes?

*Lycidas*, foiled of *Jack Joker*, had in fact

embarked already on *The Hill*, and had made there one glorious discovery. This was of the manner in which boys really talked. He had not been quite satisfied with Tom Brown's dialogue on compromise, because he had not understood it; and his mother had turned him against the vulgar raciness of "Stalky-talk." Now he met with the reality, he felt: this, he knew, was how they spoke at Shrewsbury,—calm, dignified English, like his father's, but with a few strange words thrown in. He made a list of all these strange words, putting their meaning (as explained in thoughtful footnotes) by them, thus:—

Tosh = bath. Bill = roll-call. Teek = mathematics.

These and many others he put down.

If he used them frequently enough, they would not take him for a new boy up at Shrewsbury. For this list he was grateful to *The Hill*.

There were parts, however, that he did not understand. What was he to make, he wondered, of the passage where John and Desmond stood, as the author owned, "opposite the Music Schools," and yet "for the moment they stood alone, ten thousand leagues from Harrow, alone in those sublimated spaces where soul meets soul unfettered by flesh"? And later they were said to be "in the shadow of the Spire." What could it all mean? *Lycidas* puzzled long, before he

left it, feeling vaguely uncomfortable. Perhaps he would know, when he was a Salopian. It might be something that they did at school.

He dared not ask his mother. He was afraid she would take away the book, and tell him to forget it.

There were more bits like that, and others quite different but equally beyond comprehension: for the age of thirteen knows not snobbery.

But on the whole, so far as he grasped its meaning, *The Hill* added strength to his formed theories. Once again the hero distinguished himself early at football: once again defied the masters: once again there was drink and gambling galore: once again crime—in the shape of forgery: and this bartering of school colours, “caps,”—surely that was far from right? School must be a wicked place.

On the whole, Lycidas was now certain that he had mastered all its puzzling details. There were some points on which the books had differed: but all agreed in one thing, the instantaneous success of the hero. He of *The Hill*, besides his fame at football, had passed direct into the highest form he could, the Lower Remove, and—most dazzling glory!—had on *the first* day spoken twice with the Head of

the House. Lycidas was confident of his success.

With Youth's optimism, he never dreamt that he could possibly be cast for any *rôle* but that of hero !

## CHAPTER III

### INITIATION

DURING her son's course of reading, Mrs. Marsh had been busily buying his outfit in accordance with a printed list, which showed, to her regret, that black velvet suits were not considered expedient at Shrewsbury. Still, she had too much respect for authority to go beyond the blue or black serge, with ties to match, laid down by the statute; but like a true mother she enclosed a Jaeger waistcoat, a pair of goloshes, a red flannel belt, and sundry other articles neither specified nor forbidden by the printed formula. These, later, the matron hastily suppressed.

Mother and son had only just finished, each the appointed task, when the day for separation came. Both had been too busy to indulge overmuch in that mournful anticipation which is the chief misery of parting; and the poet was frankly surprised when Mrs. Marsh remarked at bed-time on *the night before*—

"To-morrow our darling Lycidas leaves us, Thomas."

"Why, dear, dear! To be sure he does," he answered. "I must see that I have some ready money. If my memory serves me, the tip was the most important element in the good-bye. Ah, how it all comes back! Good-night, my dear."

But next morning, when the luggage was being put upon the village cab, he waxed far more poetical, standing with one hand upon his son's shoulder, the other fingering a sovereign.

"Good-bye, my boy," he said. "You are setting forth upon the first, easiest, stage of Life's pilgrimage. You are about to enter that garden of the golden apples, which we all lament as lost through our whole life. You are, indeed, to be envied, Lycidas. The years that are to come will be the happiest that you will ever know. The luggage is mounted now; so go, and luck be with you. Never forget to prove worthy of the training that your dear mother has given you. Good-bye."

Lycidas, truth to tell, did not feel that he was to be envied to any great degree. He was, indeed, choking down a lump that rose in his throat. Still, his father's words hypnotized him, as it were: he had always been a great admirer of his way of talking. What with listening to his

gorgeous phrases, and what with keeping an expectant eye upon the hand that jingled in a trouser-pocket, he managed to restrain his tears.

But when his mother stooped to kiss him, and all her fine advice fell from her as she stuttered, "God bless you, my own darling boy, and keep you safe,"—then the gates of his eyes were opened. He clung to her, kissing and hugging her, as though calling Nature to witness that he could not leave her; and then clutching the sovereign and her five shillings in a fevered hand, walked to the door, an unsteady, pathetic figure, through a blinding mist of tears. He flung himself into a corner of the cab, ashamed of his emotion, and did not dare even to look out and wave his hand, for fear of breaking down.

Yes, even in this moment, the most mournful that his life had so far brought him, he did not forget his models and the fortitude with which they had left their parents. He must not prove unworthy. Even if he could not rival the high-spirited Jack Joker, who had bonneted his head master in the railway carriage, he must at least present a tearless face to the porter who would open the cab door. Slowly, as his thoughts drifted, he grew calmer; he realized that he was clutching infinite wealth in his hand, and proudly put it in his purse; and by the time that the cab

stopped at the station, he had begun to feel the excitement of a journey.

Once and again, as the hours drew on, his thoughts flew back to his parents and his eyes brimmed with tears, but always, by a scarcely conscious effort of will, he forced himself to think of objects round him, of his great exploits-to-be, of anything except that with which his mind was full. Truly, the sorrows of Youth are bound up with trifles, but they call for no less heroism in their bearing than the larger cares of Age.

He could not fail to notice, as the journey drew near to its end, that more and more boys joined the train, often with a final wave from parents, who brought a lump up in his throat: and once, at a station where there was a change, he saw labels bearing "Shrewsbury" upon a pile of boxes. Close by it, laughing and chattering, stood five huge men, and Lycidas felt his courage sink. Were such giants really to be his fellows? He had never fully realized, despite *Stalky and Co.*, that some of the boys would be far bigger than himself. I think this first moment did much to rob Lycidas of some cherished fancies.

He did not dare to approach these most imposing people. He felt that Eric and the others would probably have done it. No doubt it was the proper thing to do, but—well, he dare not. This, incidentally, goes to show that instinct



often forms a safer guide than theory. He waited until all the boys had filtered into various carriages, with much noise and scrimmaging: then, very lonely, he climbed quietly into one that held only two old women and a sleepy parson.

“Shrewsbury! *Shrews-bury!*”

The cry woke him from a rather mournful reverie, and he hurried out, with a glance of envy at the two old women and now snoring parson, who could go on to a comfortable home, where everybody knew them.

On the platform everything was rush and bustle. “That’s mine!” “Here—the playbox, there!” “On a hansom.” “Oh, *do* buck up!” “All right, you go on and bag a hansom.’ The station resounded with such cries and with greetings of old friends, casual enough—a shrug of the shoulders, a wink, or “Hullo, Jones!”—but understood. A few others hovered, like Lycidas, alone upon the fringe, hardly daring to enter the scrimmage, not represented even by a porter. Long after the train had puffed out, as if to cut the final link with home, there was a large crowd of struggling, shouting school-boys. But at last the platform began to empty, and Lycidas got a porter to retrieve his painfully new boxes from the few that remained. The next thing was a cab, and this called for further

patience. Finally, after many frustrated attempts, the porter caught a hansom as it dashed back for a second load.

“Which house, sir?” asked the cabman.

“Mr. Alton’s house,” answered Lycidas, with a new sense of pride.

He was on the last stage of his journey.

As he leant wearily back upon the cushions, his feelings were not very painful. Perhaps he was too tired to feel much, but also the eternal spirit of adventure was stirring in another of its devotees: Lycidas Marsh was burning to embark on his new, fuller life. It was only that, at the start, his courage failed him.

“Fourpence ’apenny,” said the old man at the toll-bridge, and as he counted the change slowly into Lycidas’ palm, he added surlily, “’Ad pleasant ’olidays, young gen’lman?”

Lycidas felt pride surge up in his temples.

“Oh—er—very, thank you,” he stuttered.

The man had not known him for a new boy. Was there after all, then, no great difference? His heart was infinitely lighter, as the cab drew up at the side-entrance of Alton’s House.

Dusk was closing in round the great, red, ivy-covered building, but the light that blazed through the windows lining the approach gave the dark pile a cheery look.

“’Ave to report yourself to Mr. Alton,” said

the man who took his luggage. Lycidas remembered the way and knocked timidly upon the door.

When he entered, Mr. Alton was speaking to another boy, but got up with a short nod of dismissal.

"Very well," he said. "Let things be better this term." He said this very sternly, but a keen observer would have gathered courage from a glance at his eyes, which failed to lend colour to his words. As he came towards Lycidas, the expression of his face changed from a somewhat mournful gentleness, as of uncomplaining resignation to the weakness of youth, into a pure smile of friendly welcome.

The boy closed the door, and could be heard dashing down the passage, with the mad haste of a puppy who has lived through the ordeal of a bath.

"Oh, here's Marsh," said Mr. Alton, with a long-drawn pressure of the hand. "Well, I hope I shall never have to lecture *him!*"

"I hope not, sir," answered Lycidas, with a vague notion that he was cutting, in this first interview, a less heroic figure than certain of his models. John of *The Hill* had been called a "good sort" for defying his house master, this first evening.

"You will find," the master went on, "that

you're in a study with two steady fellows. As you've never been to school, you must do what they tell you. And as to dormitory" (he took up a list of names), "I've put you in D dormitory, under Macrae, who will be my head of the house next year. I shall expect *you* to be that for me, before you leave: keep it before you. Ah, here's some one else. Come in! Never be a school-master, Marsh!"

The knocks still sounded on the door, and between them, could be heard stifled laughs and a shuffling as of two boys scrimmaging for right of entry.

"Come in," cried the master, crescendo.

Lycidas glanced slightly round. A big boy entered, forcing a broad smile into a look of almost superhuman innocence.

"Ah, Hollins!" said Mr. Alton. Each arrival seemed, to judge from his tone, a vast surprise. "Very well, Marsh. D dormitory, and study number ten. Come to me, if you want anything."

As Lycidas went out, he stole a curious look at Hollins, who however seemed utterly oblivious of his existence. He was rather sorry to leave the house master's study: the frank, open face and kind voice of the old man had made appeal to him. He trusted Mr. Alton more than these great towering boys. Three were leaning or sitting on a book-case opposite the study door,

waiting their turn, and as he passed they broke into a laugh which, without any ground, he thought had reference to himself. Somehow he mistrusted them.

He had not begun to doubt his ultimate triumph, but he did not forget the evil times passed by Eric and the others until they defeated the school bully. How could he tell which of these boys held that proud position?

With a rather heightened colour he made his way along the passage lined on either side with doors, until he saw the number ten, and on this door he knocked politely; then, after a few seconds, entered.

He found himself in a small square room, more like Mrs. Marsh's larder than anything that he had so far seen. A rapid glance showed him to be alone, and he explored the study further. Three desks, hacked with much carving, were fixed along one wall, and against the other stood a fragile table. Hot-water pipes ran under the barred window, and on the pink plaster wall were several Jap fans, a great number of nail-holes, and four pictures swinging at a dissipated angle. Lycidas could not honestly compare it, for luxury, with his mother's boudoir, but his heart warmed to it, because he knew one-third of it belonged to him. It was to be "his study."

But he wished its other tenants would arrive.

He opened his play-box, put a few photos and other treasures on the shelf of the desk furthest from the window (this seemed to him the best), and then sat down to think.

One thing puzzled him extremely. He had been especially struck and pleased by the kindly interest which older boys had taken in Tom Brown, and Eric. Tom, he remembered, had been asked, "You fellow, what's your name? Where do you come from? How old are you? Where do you board? What form are you in?" Everybody had asked that. It had been much the same with Eric, and at Harrow.

But here at Shrewsbury every one seemed to ignore him. Boys had passed him in the passage with at most a fleeting glance, and now the one or two who startled him half out of his wits by bursting in, without a knock or with an utter fusillade, would stare about and seeing only him, go out. Lycidas began to feel that he would welcome even Eric's bully. He was lonely.

But at last one of these noisy intruders showed no sign of retreat. It was a cheery-looking boy of perhaps fifteen, who smashed down his bag upon the table, and then turned to Lycidas.

"Are you in here? You're Marsh, then," he said, rapidly. "Has Kelly come?"

"I don't think so," answered Lycidas, with his eyes fixed on this new-comer, who seemed so

enviously self-possessed. He had opened his bag and now moved towards Lycidas' desk.

"Good Lord!" he cried, staring at it. "Are those your things?"

"Yes." Lycidas was shocked at the exclamation, and wondered why his photographs were not approved: he wished he had not shown them. "But what's—what's the matter with them?"

"Matter with them? I *like* your cheek. Is it cheek, or are you a little ass? Did you really imagine you were going to have the best desk in the study? Why——"

"I'm very sorry—I didn't know," stammered Lycidas.

"Well, you'd better clear them off"—the other spoke more pleasantly—"and buck up about it. Kelly has next choice, and I expect he'll take the window corner: then you'll get the middle one."

Lycidas "bucked up," and had just moved his belongings to the table, when Kelly arrived. He was rather lanky, rather pale, and wore spectacles, but he had a pleasant enough face.

"Hullo!" he cried as he entered, obviously directing the remark to the unnamed one: he threw a look at Lycidas, but said nothing. Kelly took possession of the window corner, and across Lycidas, kept up a conversation with his friend. The two talked mainly of the holidays,

and in a moment Lycidas had gleaned the fact that the boy on his right was named McCormick. But much of what they said meant nothing to him, and neither seemed inclined to explain. He was not sorry when a bell rang and he followed them to prayers, and then after another bell up to the dormitories.

"D's along there," said Kelly, at the stair-head. "Good-night."

Lycidas, in his humbler mood, was grateful for the attention and the guidance. He went along the passage and entered the room which had D painted on its door. Two or three boys were standing in a group by one of the beds, and glanced about at his entry as if expecting someone, but seeing who it was, went on talking again. Lycidas wondered whether they were plotting to toss him in a blanket or to roast him. To his delight, he saw there was no fire. The roasting must be done elsewhere. Ah, yes, of course, Tom Brown had been roasted in the Hall, downstairs. . . .

The only other occupant of the room was a small boy, with a round, lively face, and dark gleaming eyes, who sat hugging his knees on his bed and watched the scene with no symptom of anything except amusement. Lycidas thought that he remembered him at the entrance examination—he was one of those stupid boys



who had taken him for Lord Fauntleroy. Still, he was not sure. He sat upon the bed with "Marsh" written over it, and made slow pretence of unfastening his waistcoat.

Presently, the door opened, to admit a boy far more broadly formed than any as yet in the room. His pale, clean-lined features had a certain classic hardness about them. As he shut the door, the little group within broke up and each of those who had formed it walked to his own bed. This was obviously Macrae: he had monitor writ large upon him: and it was also clear that his dormitory had respect for him.

Macrae shook hands with all whom he had not seen in the studies, and when he came to Lycidas did not pass him by but held his hand for a moment, gazing into his eyes as if to guess what he could do for Alton's.

"You're one of our recruits," he said lightly: but Lycidas could answer nothing—Macrae was so magnificent!

He noticed that no one showed any sign of undressing. All sat upon their beds, and there was a hum of conversation, mainly reminiscence of holidays well spent and otherwise. Lycidas did not like to undress too far, until the rest began: he sat on his bed and passed in review the four boys who, with the two newcomers, *formed the full strength of D dormitory.* He

tried to decide who would be the bully? What of the stern, firm-jawed Macrae? Would he be the first to cast a slipper, when Lycidas knelt down to pray?

For on that point Lycidas was quite determined: he would pray. He had enjoyed nothing more in *Tom Brown* than the scene where the young boy knelt to pray; the boys stood in silent scorn till the bully threw a slipper at him; and then Tom came to the rescue. He would repeat the scene. In a Shrewsbury room, as in a Rugby, a slight pathetic form, clad in pure white, should fall upon its knees and brave the scornful jeers of all the room.

Lycidas had not thought about the fruits of his action, nor was he moved by any deep religious feeling. Had he been able to see into his motives, he would have found himself urged partly by custom but chiefly by the dramatic instinct: he must be in the centre of the tableau. But indeed he did not think, he merely waited, resolved so soon as the rest began, to undress quickly and then fall boldly on the hard boards by his bed.

And suddenly, while he waited, a bell sounded in the corridor outside, and without a word every boy in the room knelt down to pray. "Digging" is a universal habit at Shrewsbury School.

With a distinct sense of disappointment, which

it would have needed an older head to analyze, Lycidas got off his bed and followed suit.

"Digs" over, most of the boys stripped to their waists, and began to wash, splashing floor and trousers generously in the process. Lycidas made haste to do the same, trying to hide the shivers caused by the unwonted coldness of the water. He had scarcely restored himself to some semblance of warmth by vigorous friction with a rough towel, slipped on his nightshirt and hurried into bed, before another bell rang. He and the other new boy were the only two undressed.

"I say, buck up!" exclaimed the monitor. "That's third bell."

Steps sounded in the passage, and presently the man-servant came in, followed by Mr. Alton.

Lycidas noticed that whilst the other boys made haste to undress properly, the second largest, who had the corner bed opposite Macrae's, merely pulled back the white coverlet, leapt upon his bed and, by long practice, neatly concealed his booted form, just as the master entered. The privileged Macrae did not even stoop to such guileful tactics. He stood by his bed, half-dressed but undismayed, unterrified.

Mr. Alton's eyes swept round the beds and then up to the windows. "Good-night," he cried and met a universal echo with a "Sir" *tacked on.*

“Call me at six-thirty, John,” sang out the monitor. All men-servants are Johns at Shrewsbury, and many a proud Ferdinand has found himself docked to one poor syllable.

“Yes, sir,” said the John, by the gas-bracket; and in one moment all was darkness.

On the first night of term a certain quietness, bred half of fatigue, hangs over even the most noisy spirits. There was a sleepy discussion for some minutes as to various boys' chances for their footer “firsts”; but gradually it lost what vitality it had, and soon Macrae said, “Well, I'm fagged: Good-night”—a gentle hint that talking (forbidden by the letter of the law) must stop.

Lycidas lay, starting at every bed that creaked, and listening for moving forms. He was certain that once Macrae had got to sleep, some one would come and “turn his bed up,” or do something similar. Perhaps they might even yet drag him, gagged, along the corridor and toss him there. Well, he would make a fight for it!

He lay and waited: but nothing happened. Surely there had never before been a new boy who had passed his first night without some one trying to ill-treat him?

He sat up and looked around. The moon shone clear through the long uncurtained windows, and every shape that it lit seemed fast asleep. Lycidas lay down again and waited.

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And nothing happened.

At last, still waiting, he gave what sounded like a sigh, then a comfortable grunt, and sank off into that deep rest which niggard Nature grudges to all except its darling Youth.

## CHAPTER IV

### GROPING

LYCIDAS awoke to the hearty ringing of a bell, which sounded hollow in the boarded corridor.

Where was he ?

For a moment he believed himself at home, and then—the wide, pink walls—the great airy room—the huddled forms—he remembered : he was at Shrewsbury !

He rose on one elbow and looked at his watch, still new enough to be a toy. Seven o'clock ! Must he get up, then ? He gazed sleepily about him. Nobody seemed to have an idea of doing so ! indeed no one seemed awake. Macrae, even, who had wished to be called at half-past six, was breathing heavily. Ought he to wake them ? Would they all be late ?

The atmosphere of sleep was seemingly infectious, for Lycidas awoke with no less of a start, when the next bell rang, exactly fifteen minutes later.

Surely he should get up now ? One boy turned

drowsily upon his side, fumbled beneath his pillow for a watch, gazed in an owlish manner at it, and then, as if well satisfied, lay down again. But others were apparently astir. Through the ventilator above the door came the patter of bare feet, a phrase or two and, puzzling background to it all, a constant sound of splashing water with intermittent cries of "Coming."

Whilst he wondered, Macrae bounded from his bed with a nerve-breaking suddenness, hurled off his pyjamas, jerked a towel over his shoulder, and with a long-drawn cry of "Co-o-oming!" dashed madly from the room.

Lycidas was more puzzled than ever. What was going on outside? Could it be a roll-call or—what was the word?—"Bill"?

He was still listening and guessing, when Macrae rushed in again, dripping as he ran, and making vain attempts to dry himself.

"You'd better get up, unless you're a quick-dresser," he cried to Lycidas. "Only twenty minutes to chapel, now. Wake the other man there," and he interrupted his nimble dressing to point towards the second new boy.

Lycidas woke him, then stood embarrassed, at a loss what he should do. The monitor, remembering his own first day, remarked, his head wrestling with a stiff-starched shirt, "You'd *better* buck up and get swilled; there'll be a

ram there, once third bell goes. Round to the left: you'll hear the water. . . . No, no dressing-gown: just take your towel."

It was rather cold along the draughty passages, with only an all too insufficient towel as garment, and Lycidas felt no warmer as, waiting his turn at the "swills," he watched the exact nature of the process. About five and a half feet from the tiled floor a thick pipe jutted from the wall a foot and then gave a downward bend, to finish in a slit, from which water dashed with an enormous force. As each of the waiting boys came to his turn, he looped his towel over the swill room's open door, and hurried under the cataract. Head first, then limbs, then body, were put under and scrubbed vigorously with his sponge, and then by a rapid turn he would gain the full force of the water up and down his back-bone. Then spluttering and wringing moisture from his hair, he would call "Coming?" and the next, however far away, would bellow "Coming!" for the splash of the swill, as it is turned gradually on, is not the best part of the business. But on this first day, early rising was in fashion, and now that third bell threatened, there was little real need to call "Coming?" All were anxiously waiting to come.

All perhaps except Lycidas. Lycidas was not sure that the ceremony tempted him. He



remembered nothing like this in all his books; and his father had remarked, "Ah, my boy, school now is not the thing it was in *my* day. No washing underneath the pump—but hot baths, with a heated towel for drying! . . ." Well, he hoped the swill was warm. Otherwise he would prefer the pump.

"Coming?" Some one nudged him: "It's your turn. Go on!" "Yes," he cried, timidly, threw his towel up on the door, and entered.

The swill was certainly not heated: Lycidas guessed that at once: and it came with some force upon one's head. He hurriedly drew back and put his arms beneath the stream. That was better. He was sure he must show his discomfort in his face. Thank goodness, he had his back turned! Back! One had to have it on one's back!

Lycidas did not have it on his back for long: indeed, a boy's first swill is commonly his briefest. It is among the acquired tastes, the swill; but once acquired, it yields to few for pleasantness.

He thought he heard a laugh or two, as he staggered to the side and shouted, tremulously, "Coming?" and his misery was increased by the discovery that his towel no longer hung upon the door. Was this the first act of the bully?

A second thought occurred. A somewhat larger towel hung in its place: perhaps one just

used *any* towel. Without reasoning further than that he must dry somehow, he snatched the towel. A minute's rubbing, and a healthy glow, unknown to his warm baths at home, began to spread itself across his skin.

"Coming?" shouted the deep voice of his successor in the second swill-room.

Lycidas glanced up: it was the Head of the House, who had read the roll last night. He glanced at him in admiration, and suddenly this turned to pleasure. The Head of the House, after a side glance, walked straight towards him! Just as this great person had addressed John of the Hill, so he would now speak to him—and so informally! He had not even dried himself! He was coming, first, to make friends with the new boy!

At the opening note, the big boy's voice did not seem very pleasant. "Whose towel have you got?" he asked roughly.

"Er—I don't know."

"Well, it's mine! What the deuce do you mean by taking it?"

Lycidas was staggered. "I—I thought one used anybody's."

"Well, one jolly well doesn't: so just remember it," said the Head of the House, snatching his towel angrily away. "And new scum ought to use the other swill-room."

Lycidas could no longer complain of cold: he felt himself growing purple. *Him* to be addressed in this way! He was too upset to answer: and this must be set down as luck for him. "There's your towel, probably, behind the door," said somebody. Lycidas picked it up, and bolted for his dormitory: he hoped that none of the boys there had been present. He was consoled only by something that he heard whispered, as he took his towel. "Beastly rough luck on the kid: but so like Parker, isn't it?"

As he hurried back to D, the third bell rang out, longer, louder than the other two. He was met by endless flying figures.

"Ten minutes to Chapel, sir," said the John to Lycidas, as he went by.

So he must hurry! Lycidas left the house just as the chapel bell began, and walked at racing step, thinking himself desperately late. It seemed as though the bell would stop at every beat. He arrived far earlier than was ever likely to be the case again, and was put at the back of the chapel with other new boys, until their place in school should be determined. Gradually the pews filled up with boys of varying sleepiness and breathlessness, until at the first stroke of a quarter to eight from the school clock, after some scuffling, the door was





Photo: W. D. Baylton

“NOT OF AN AGE TO NOTICE MUCH MORE THAN THE LARGENESS OF THE NOBLE CHAPEL.”

shut. A few excluded Peris could be heard retreating.

It was a short, hurried, not exceedingly impressive service, and Lycidas was not of an age to notice much more than the largeness of the noble chapel. His attention was given mainly to the personal. This was the first time that he had seen the school assembled, and as he gazed along the rows of heads, gradually rising (with a few dense excrescences) from small to large, he was a trifle over-awed.

Perhaps in his curiosity he had craned about too much, for when he turned his head round to see what was there, he was met by the cold, glassy frown of four masters, who sat throned in a high seat close behind. They so obviously disapproved of him that he grew quite uncomfortable. He could feel their glances burning through his head. Lycidas did not like those four overseers. He must certainly gain a high place in the school, if only to get out of range: masters were rare among the upper rows of seats.

On such small things does Youth's ambition hinge!

He had begun to guess at the pew where he would sit, and had just decided that he could not see so far along the chapel, when he realized that the service was over. Lycidas was sorry; still, he felt quite ready for his breakfast. He had

never known so short a service ; it had not struck the hour yet.

Out the boys filed, row by row, and Lycidas knew some by sight. He frowned at Parker, smiled pleasantly at Kelly ; but neither took the slightest notice. At last, all had gone except the new boys ; and a master stepped down from the high back-seat.

“ Follow me, please, all new boys,” he said.

Eight struck as they left the chapel.

The master led them, mainly silent and mutually suspicious, into the school building and up many steps to a large form-room. They were asked, politely, to take seats, and foolscap was set before them. To Lycidas this seemed strangely like the entrance examination ; and a test of mathematics it turned out to be. Personally, he would much have preferred his breakfast. He took little interest in that hour's work. He just did enough to show that he had mastered mathematics, but he was glad when the clock struck nine.

When he reached the open air, endless boys were scudding swiftly to the shop, in keen rivalry for rolls, twists, buns, and other indigestibles. Lycidas neither understood, nor took part in the scene ; to him this haste seemed most unwise, particularly before breakfast. Mrs. Marsh had *always* told him that it was unwise even to stoop

and lace his boots before taking sustenance. He went straight up to Alton's and followed the stream of boys into Hall.

The matron was standing before two steaming urns and more than forty pure white tea-cups, near the entrance, and beckoned to him as he entered.

"The new boys sit down at this end, Mr. Marsh," she said.

He went to where she had pointed, the lower end of the nearest long table, next the door. The new boy from D dormitory was there already, red with exertion, but triumphant in possession of two sticky buns. Lycidas sat down beside him.

"Why, you're Lord Fauntleroy, aren't you?" he said, looking up.

"You called me that," Lycidas answered, "but it's not really my name."

"Oh, our mistake!" said the other gaily, and cried to a boy opposite, "his name isn't *really* Fauntleroy!" Lycidas noticed that they both seemed tickled by their error.

"What's your name?" he asked his neighbour, to set him at his ease again.

"Russell."

"Russell!" he repeated, and stared until the other said, "Yes, Russell! I suppose you've no objection, have you?"



“N—no! But it’s—you know that was the name of Eric’s great friend.”

Russell’s bright eyes gleamed more brightly. “And is your name Eric, then?”

“No, my name’s Lycidas; but perhaps we may be friends, like Eric and Russell.”

“Lycidas!” Russell made no pretence of swallowing his laughter. “Oh, that’s good! You’re not such a fool as you look, are you? What is your name, really?”

Lycidas, in his reply, went far towards justifying this estimate of his intelligence. He realized that his name was regarded, for some reason, as a splendid joke, and that Christian names were not so much used by school-boys as his books had led him to suppose.

“Marsh,” he answered, simply.

“I *thought* you were Fauntleroy, when I saw you upstairs last night,” said Russell, “but I wasn’t sure, and a chap can’t be too careful not to speak first to men who’ve been here longer.”

“Can’t he?” Lycidas was groping for his etiquette.

Russell looked at him, as at a curious animal, for several moments; then as though something urged the question, asked, “What school do you come from?”

“I’ve not been to one. I came from home.”

"Good lord, you *will* have a lot to learn!" Russell spoke with undiluted scorn.

"I've read all about it," answered Lycidas, with warmth.

Russell declined to argue on the value of imparted knowledge.

"What are you doing this afternoon?" he asked instead.

"I don't know."

"Well, get leave to come down Town. We'll go together. I'll show you the sort of things you'll want."

"Oh, thank you."

Lycidas envied this boy, who seemed to know his way about already, and was genuinely grateful for his help. How he wished, in that moment, that he had been to school before! He felt so helpless, so utterly ignorant, each moment, of what he ought to do, the next.

It would, however, be a mistake to lavish too much pity on him; he was by no means unhappy in these days. The life was too new, too full of surprises, to leave space for seasons of homesickness. He trusted, at first, implicitly to Russell, who was too proud of his superior knowledge of life to be bored by his friend's ignorance. Russell revelled in telling him all that he knew even several things that he did not. He piloted him to the main building for the two-hour

“second-lesson,” spent in probing further into new boys’ knowledge, and afterwards he took him round and showed him the school site. Much of it Russell had not seen before, but with all he exhibited an acquaintance which amounted almost to fatigue. At lunch, the one meal where the house master attends and the boys’ places at table are arranged by him, they found that their seats came together. Lycidas, for his part, was delighted. His mind fed with memories of the fine idylls of Friendship which he had read, he saw in his familiarity with Russell a union that would last their lives. Much of what the other said he did not understand: and so his mother would have wished it.

Fate, in these first days, delighted to bring together this ill-assorted pair, the boy who knew much too little, and the boy who knew a little too much.

Russell, at least, did not fail in his promise as to showing him what he would want. To Lycidas his knowledge both of this and of the town seemed almost uncanny.

“There’s one shop where everybody goes,” he said. “It’s in the Market Place, wherever that is. Did you ask the men in your study what they wanted you to get? Oh, well, anyhow you’ll have to have a cup, and so forth, and some ornaments. Then if there’s a kettle or

something still wanted, so much the better—it'll give you an excuse for leave to-morrow."

In such wise would he rattle on. Lycidas' share in the dialogue was more ingenuous. He babbled of his plans in all departments, not realizing that he could meet with rivalry in any, to the great delight of Russell. Time after time, his words betrayed some fatal misconception of school life; but Russell never gave a sign. Nor did he offer any hints on these big points. That would have been spoiling sport; he found Lycidas amusing.

Only once did he correct him, and that because the issue threatened to involve himself.

Lycidas and he were wearing with great pride the School straw hat, a speckled black and white "creation" of a rather clerical, and totally unpleasing, aspect. As they came into the Market Place a town boy, moved by their pride perhaps, or possibly indulging in an invariable habit, cried, "Where did you get that hat?" The cry was taken up by his ragged company.

Lycidas remembered. Of course, there was always a risk of a fight with the Town! He glanced anxiously around. Six of them and not another Shrewsbury boy in sight!

Now at least he could show Russell that he knew what to do. He pulled him back against

a pillar of the old Market House, and lifted up his voice—

“The School! The School!”

“Shut up!” cried Russell, angrily, while the town boys burst into shrieks of ribald merriment. As chance would have it, two big Salopians had come round the corner at the moment; they went by with raised eyebrows of scorn that went beyond amusement.

“Come on!” Russell said. “Let’s get into the shop. You’ve made a nice fool of us both.”

He would hear no explanation and walked very rapidly until he got within the shop, outside which hung every possible kind of domestic article. Inside, it was the same. A dim half-light glinted on innumerable tin implements that were suspended overhead.

Small groups of boys stood here and there, busy furnishing their studies. So soon as he secured a salesman, Russell seemed to have no doubt of what he wanted. He bought a cup and saucer, plate, spoon, knife; a hammer, and assorted tacks; six Japanese fans and two framed prints of railway engines; together with a vase shaped like a pine-apple, and a table-cloth in red and blue. Lycidas did not see how he could possibly improve on the selection; but fired by a desire to excel, he added to it a paper-basket and a lemon-squeezer. This put one and a penny on

to a total cost of three and eightpence. Lycidas felt proud, but not a little dismayed, at paying over so much money.

Russell, it appeared, had other purchases to make, and with this object dived into a picturesque old street, which ran down a hill and boasted the strange name of Mardol. Suddenly he said, "This will do: you wait," and walked into a shop. Lycidas could see nothing in the window except papers and tobacco; Russell was probably looking for some local journal. When he came out, however, he held nothing in his hand.

"Couldn't you get it?" asked Lycidas.

"Oh, yes, I got it all right."

"But I don't see——" He broke off abruptly. Why had he not guessed? Were not smoking and drinking the two most common vices? He had got used to them on paper: but now, in real life——

"Russell," he cried, "you haven't been—you didn't go in to get tobacco?"

Russell laughed. "Tobacco? No! I went in to buy a sugar-stick."

Lycidas did not believe him: a sugar-stick would not go in his pocket. They walked for a little while in silence, and then Russell was the first to speak.

"You know *you're* breaking rules, my virtuous Eric!"

"I! Indeed not!" The retort was worthy of the actual Eric.

"Aren't you, though? Didn't you hear Old Alton say we were to go nowhere except to that shop in the Market Place? Oh, by the way, if we're stopped, we've lost our way."

"No, I think *I* know it; it's straight up the hill."

Russell shrugged himself and laughed in a superior manner. It pleased Lycidas, however, to see that he was right, and he could not refrain from saying so, when they regained the High Street.

"There, you see! It *was* straight on."

Russell was moved to say, "Marsh, you're a wonder," and Lycidas was pleased. He had begun to feel that Russell knew far more than he.

After that, they said little. Lycidas could not but be worried by the thought that, so soon, he had been trapped into wrong-doing. And he had set himself to be—O irony—a second Russell! Yet, after all, he was a boy before his parents made of him a prig, and deep down in him he felt that delight which comes to boys only as escort of a broken rule. His mingled feelings left him dumb.

They passed along the glorious avenue of limes in silence, and only when the School ferry set

them down below the zig-zag path that climbs the hill, did Russell speak.

“We shall have to hump ourselves for call-over,” he said.

“Don’t they call it ‘Bill’?” asked Lycidas in disappointment.

“I know I heard some of the men talk of ‘call-over’ to-day.” (Boys are always men to boys.)

Lycidas felt like one who has lost an old friend, as they dashed up the hill. He had loved that word “bill.” He wondered if “teek” and the others were as valueless, but did not care to humble himself by inquiring. He had learnt many things to-day.

There were other things to learn, ere bed-time came. Among these were the details of the art of brewing (a brew in English is a study-tea), together with his task as scavenger. There is no great survival of fagging at Shrewsbury, and Lycidas found his work to lie chiefly in the stirring of boiling milk and in the washing-up of tea-things. There are four studies which, by virtue of holding one or more monitors among their number, may claim this privilege; and when one of their occupants cries “Scavenger,” the appointed new boy must rush wildly, at the risk of ghastly punishment. Lycidas found also that McCormick expected a like service of him;



Kelly mildly washed up his own. He discovered too, that Shrewsbury is pronounced as though its "ew" were a long "o," and not as if bound up with "shrew." This was only a little of what Lycidas Marsh learnt that day.

In the evening, the whole passage echoed with the hammer's sound. All were proudly decking their studies with decorative treasures old and new. There are certain heirlooms which, escaping wreckage by a miracle beyond our ken, are handed down from year to year in various studies: but fans and pictures are imported yearly.

Number ten was busy with the rest. Kelly and McCormick showed far more geniality, though of a condescending sort, to Lycidas. Kelly, in particular, was almost friendly; the other seemed to treat Lycidas as a huge and rather tiresome jest. His Jap fans and railway engine pictures met, however, with entire approval, and he did not confess that Russell had advised them. His own purchases met with quite a different reception.

"You don't mean to say," cried Kelly, "that you've bought a lemon-squeezer for the winter term? And who the devil wants a paper-basket?"

There were several odd articles that failed to fit the scheme of decoration, which was of alternate fans and pictures, hung to match; and

with these it was decided to place Lycidas' purchases, to the end of sale by auction.

McCormick stood out in the passage, shouting, "Auction! *Auc-tion!* Number ten!"

Discipline is lax on the first night and any pretext for a row is welcome. Auctions are a favourite pretext. Doors were heard to slam, and almost immediately the study was filled with a number of boys ridiculously out of measure with its size. McCormick stood upon a table, and with many noisy interludes, sold each thing separately.

The waste-paper basket, to its owner's horror, went for twopence, and he bought the lemon-squeezer in at threepence.

After prayers at nine o'clock, Mr. Alton came round the studies, and showed great pretence of admiration. Twenty years had made him an adept at this.

By the time that the bed-bell rang, just before ten o'clock, Lycidas was frankly tired. So far, the novelty and excitement of everything had kept him alert, but now that Mr. Alton's coming had quelled the horse-play, he found his eyelids heavy; and, once in bed, without giving a thought to "tossing" or to "turning up," he rolled on to his right side and with the buzz of conversation still around him, fell asleep.

## CHAPTER V

### ENTER DISILLUSION

SATURDAYS at school are always restful, but none more restful than the first of term. This is, indeed, the nearest that Shrewsbury gains to a whole holiday. Lycidas found to his delight that the clanging bells did not begin, that day, till eight-fifteen; but also found to his amazement that this blissful state of affairs was spoken of as a "long lie," and not a "frowst." Could things have changed since the Harrow book was written?

But he did not worry overmuch about these problems: he was content with the longer rest, by any name. Downstairs in the study, while waiting for the "reading of the order," which is the central fact of this first Saturday, he learnt one more lesson. He had been talking to Kelly, attempting to gain knowledge as to the system by which a new boy's form was fixed.

"I suppose all that 'teek' yesterday makes no difference?" he said, with proud emphasis on the idiom.

"Teek?" repeated Kelly, dully.

"All that mathematics we did."

"Oh! maths, yes. But wherever did you get that word?"

"From *The Hill*."

"The hill?" Kelly repeated this in tones of even greater horror. Could the young idiot be mad?

"The Harrow book, you know."

The other threw back his head and laughed.

"Oh, so that's it. Have you got any other words from it?"

"Oh, lots, yes," came the guileless answer. "Tosh for wash: swat for work: whop for thrash: skew for—er, I forget: and—and——"

"It doesn't matter," said Kelly, somewhat dryly, "in fact, I should forget them all. They may be all right at Harrow, but they won't wash here. You'll only get horribly ragged, if you use them."

"Thank you for telling me," said Lycidas humbly. Why had not Russell, who seemed to know everything, corrected him? He was grateful to Kelly. His heart warmed to this sad-looking, gentle boy with the gold spectacles. Dare he ask a further favour?

"I wish—would you mind telling me the Shrewsbury words?"

"Well, sap's work," began Kelly, and then broke off. "You'll find them out for yourself, and it's much better: you'd only go using them too much, or all wrong. That sort of thing's so beastly private-schooly." He took out his watch. "Hullo, it's about time to be going down."

Even as he spoke, a boy hammered on the door and burst in at the same moment. "Coming down, Kelly?"

"Right you are—half a jiff!"

Lycidas had hoped that Kelly might have asked him to go down with him. Would he have, he wondered, if the other boy had not come in? Directly his friend came, Kelly had seemed to take no more notice of him. It was just as though he had been ashamed of talking to a new boy. Lycidas felt lonely. His thoughts turned to Russell, and he went into the passage. A silence was on the place, and though he knew Russell's study to be number three, he did not like to knock. Then the idea struck him that he might be late, and he hurried out.

Boys were strolling up and down the grass-lined centre path, but the largest group stood clustered on the stones that front the main entrance. All walked in couples or in larger bodies, and Lycidas, vaguely ashamed of being alone, dodged in and out until he reached the

crowd. He was scarcely there when, to his vast relief, the great doors opened from within.

Every one surged forward, as at the theatre's early door, and with a mighty stamping the whole mob, Lycidas in its midst scarcely touching the floor with his feet, streamed through the hall and up the long stone stairs. Lycidas found himself in the large room, where he had worked the day before. Great lines of wooden benches stretched from end to end of this largest form-room, which boasts the name of Top Schools, or more briefly, Toppers. Masters stood here and there, and the same who had marshalled the new boys in chapel now beckoned Lycidas to a low seat near the entrance. There was a great clatter as the boys climbed over forms and desks to join their friends. The largest boys stood at the back or lounged, as though insufferably bored, on the deep window-seats. There was a slight attempt at applause, quelled by the masters, as the Head entered through a side door, clutching a great sheaf of papers, and stepped forward. A few of the more earnest-looking boys were obviously nervous.

The head master raised his papers, looked around the room, lowered them a little, and then: "There must be perfect silence while the lists are read out. The Upper Sixth," he said; and in a slow monotone read the order of the form as

fixed by the examination. As each boy heard his name, he answered, "Here, sir."

Lycidas was as yet only mildly interested: he was waiting for his name, and there was little chance that he should be so low as the sixth form—he hoped he might be in the second. John, the Harrow boy, he recollected, had been in the Lower Remove, the highest form open to a new boy there. How he had thrilled when, as the head master ran up the school-list, John's name still had not appeared. Clearly, Shrewsbury agreed with Harrow in this: they read the lowest form out first. And when the Remove was reached, still no "Marsh" was read. He was beating even John!

He had noticed, dreamily, what big boys they were who had cried, "Here, sir," to names in the Sixth. What dunces they must be! And now, as the master reached the higher forms, he noticed that the voices grew more treble and their owners smaller. For one moment a ghastly fear crossed his mind that the list was being read the other way, the top forms first. And yet "The Sixth"! How could the sixth form be first? He put the thought behind him.

As the list ran down the fifth forms, and the Shells (what did this mean?), then through the Fourths, he grew into a very ferment of excitement. They were in the third forms now!

His blood throbbed round his temples: he could not hear anything. But suddenly the word "Marsh" struck upon his ears. Surely the head master had put extra emphasis upon it? Perhaps he was surprised to find a new boy so unusually high!

Lycidas swallowed a great lump in his dry throat, and forced himself to answer, "Here, sir!" The whole room seemed to leer at him, to fix him with innumerable eyes. He put his hand up to his face, and it was burning.

But mingled with his embarrassment was pride. He had not heard exactly; but he was, at the lowest, in the Third! How many forms were there above him? He tried to force himself to listen.

He suddenly realized that the speaker's voice had changed. He was no longer reading a list; he was giving out some notice. Lycidas was sure now, that no name had come after his, the extra emphasis had been no illusion. Either he was in the first form, or the third form was the highest, or else—the third possibility he scarcely bore in mind; he was so certain that he would start high.

His brain was still rioting, when the head master ceased and the boys began going out by sections of the room. Some of those who passed glanced curiously at Lycidas.



This was probably the proudest moment of his life. He was hardly conscious of what went on around him: his thoughts were far away. How delighted they would be at home! He saw his whole career mapped out. His head was so light that it seemed almost to have left his body.

Suddenly the next boy nudged him, and with those around him he went out. Russell joined him on the staircase, but did not congratulate. Perhaps he was jealous!

"I didn't hear your name," said Lycidas, "where are you?"

"I'm in the same as you—but higher. Never mind, though. My pater says lots of good men have begun bottom of the school—he says it pays really, but I forget why. So buck up! You look so beastly tragic about it."

The blood had indeed rushed back from Lycidas' brain, and left him pasty white. This was the first hard blow that life had given him, and it is a tribute to the innate reserve of boyhood that, untutored though he was by school conventions, his first impulse was of thankfulness that he had not betrayed his hideous mistake to Russell. He choked down the agony of that instant's change from pride to misery, and tried to smile. For possibly the last time in his school existence, he heralded the form-room as a welcome friend. The task

of setting down the list of books which it appeared he had to order, kept his mind employed; and later, as he fought for pens and paper (which is known as "penal" and is sold by "gats,") at the little stationery depôt on the stairs, the few thoughts that came to him were of absolute thanksgiving that nobody except himself would ever know the error he had made. How could he have done it? Yet why call the head form the sixth? Why had no one ever warned him?

It was afterwards, when he found himself alone in number ten, that the bitterest thought came to him. He had always, unconsciously, seen himself as hero: he had been John, Russell, Eric, until Eric fell from the right path. He had followed their successes as his own, ignored their failures as no part of him. And now—at the first step—he had failed! John had started high, as high as possible, and Lycidas had set himself to do the same. Yet he had failed! He rested his hot head upon the soiled baize that covered his desk-top. A dark idea flashed over him.

Was he, after all, more suited to be Stalky?

He had just remembered that Tom Brown had started low, when Russell entered and suggested a "walk round."

In half-an-hour Lycidas had quite forgotten, and was laughing. Happy Youth!

There was so much to see, still; and Russell had so much to tell him about everybody, everything. He had no respect for persons.

“You’ve got such a funny, squeaky voice, I expect they’ll make you Hall Crier,” he told Lycidas.

The prophecy proved false. Shrewsbury houses boast four officers—a Hall Constable, Library Scavenger, Postman, and Hall Crier. The last three are chosen from among the newer boys, and while there is no great competition for these posts, that of Constable is envied, not for its duties, which are trivial, but as a sign of popularity. This ballot, carried out with solemnity, is a matter of grave import. All watch anxiously, while the bigger boys undo the paper slips and read the name inside to the recorder: and at the end of this election, which comes last, the cheers are vigorous. For the rest, the tasks of tidying the Library and giving out the letters demand no special gifts, nor does the choosing of these officers call forth great enthusiasm. The Crier, on the other hand, is different. His task it is, when any announcement, whether of things found and lost or of House notices, has to be made, to stand upon a form at meal time and cry—

## ENTER DISILLUSION

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“Oyez, Oyez, Oyez, this is to give notice that . . . . . God save the King, and down with the Radicals !”

He is elected first, and will announce the results of the three later polls. Boyish sense of humour (to call it by no harsher name) demands that the Crier shall, if possible, be either a Radical or cursed with an impediment of speech. If foiled of both these creamy jests, the House must put up with somebody unpopular—Crier is a post not envied.

It is recorded that, in ancient days, any hardy Radical who would not mouth the words was pelted with plates, slippers, spoons, till he recanted or retreated. Such scenes are of the past, and no boy now refuses. Political consciences, one fears, are more elastic now-a-days.

Lycidas sat in terror, while the slips were being handed round. There was much consultation and much borrowing of pencils. The ceremony is taken slowly, since it serves to pass an evening. It seemed to him that every one who spoke suggested Marsh.

This, however, cannot have been so, for when the result was announced, it proved to be an unpopular second-term boy who stuttered. He rose and bashfully hammered out the fact of his election. Lycidas, relieved that the omniscient Russell had been mistaken, did not pity him who

had taken his place, nor look forward to the risks of next term's poll. He laughed gaily with the others.

Lycidas had no lack of food for thought that night. The excitement of the election, his first experience of the swimming bath, the novelty of the hour-and-a-half preparation (once more in Top Schools)—all these had served to dull the memory of his disappointment. His thoughts were confused, but averagely cheerful, and he found himself less sleepy, listening to the conversation.

Macrae, it seemed, was in the House football eleven, and the talk came round once more to the absorbing topic of "Alton's" chances for the challenge cap. Somebody wondered whether any of the new fellows were any good, and it seemed to Macrae that a chance offered to find out as to two of them.

"Are you awake, Marsh?"

"Yes," answered Lycidas, a sinking at his heart. Of what ordeal would this be the opening?

"Well, are you any good at footer?"

"I'm afraid not. My mother never allowed me to play."

There was a suspicion of a titter round the dormitory, and Macrae, who had a gentle heart for those weaker than himself, said, "Oh well,

you'll soon pick it up," and rapidly turned to Russell with the same question.

"I was captain at my preparatory school," he answered, pride struggling with a fear of being charged with "lift."

"And at cricket too?" asked Macrae.

"Yes," answered Russell as though half ashamed.

"Good man! We must try you. I suppose you didn't play cricket either, Marsh?"

"No." Monosyllable, it cost Lycidas a struggle in its speaking.

"Well, I saw you could swim, this morning. You must pass the test, and then perhaps cox the house-boat in the summer. We all do something for the House in D." The House was Macrae's hobby.

Lycidas felt more than grateful to him. He had always admired Macrae as a marvellous and mighty person; but now he would do anything for him. Further, he felt that now he must do something for the House. Even Macrae, anxious to spare the new boy embarrassment, did not realize what large results might grow from his stray utterance. It is a habit with boys to under-estimate their influence.

Yet Lycidas, though full of good resolves for future energy, was also filled with present misery. Why had he been stopped from playing?

## 80 THE BENDING OF A TWIG

Certainly, he had despised games; he had been taught to do so; but he had had no idea how they were valued at a Public School. Could he ever be popular now? He was not even good at work! How he envied Russell, Russell who seemed able to do everything.

While he lay, casting his troubles to and fro, scarcely listening to the further course of the conversation, the door creaked and opened to admit white noiseless figures.

Now indeed his heart beat fast, now, at least, they had come in to toss him!

“Who is it?” asked Macrae.

“Only me, Hollins, and the Rabbit,” came the answer. Macrae seemed to understand.

“Have you any songsters here?” asked Hollins, whose voice Lycidas recognized. Since his first view of him in the House Master’s study, he had learnt that Hollins was a great man, captain of the House football and secretary to the School Eleven.

“We haven’t tried them yet,” Macrae answered. He always gave new boys a night or two in which to settle down: he would have liked to postpone the singing till a little later. But Hollins was a mighty man. “We’ll experiment now. Can you sing, Marsh?”

Mrs. Marsh had cherished a great admiration for her son’s singing. She had made him sing

before the Vicar, who had said that it seemed a pity to strain a voice of such quality by church-choir use : otherwise he would have liked him.

“Yes, I can sing a lot,” said Lycidas proudly.

“We only want a little at first,” Hollins interjected. “What song can you sing? Something funny.”

Lycidas' songs were mainly religious. “I know ‘Killaloe,’” he said.

“M! All the newest songs!” Hollins spoke a little dryly. “Well, strike up!”

Lycidas began. It pleased him to have been asked to do something which he was able to do, and to do well. Perhaps his singing might atone for all the other things. He put all the soul that he possessed into the song. He sang it slowly, lingering upon the notes. He felt rather sad. How often he had sung it to his mother!

He finished the first verse, and was on the point of opening the second, when Hollins said hastily, “That's quite enough!”

“I know two verses more,” said Lycidas.

“I dare say : but we won't have them. It's too beastly touching.”

“Oh, rough luck,” he heard Macrae whisper. The white figures had settled on the monitor's bed.

Lycidas had learnt the meaning of “rough luck,” but did not see its force. Personally, he



was grateful to Hollins for the compliment; it was something to have touched any one so seemingly callous as he. But perhaps Macrae's sympathy had been for Hollins.

"You've another new kid, haven't you?" asked the speaker who had heralded himself as "me."

"Yes—Russell. What can you sing, Russell?"

"Oh, I can't sing," Russell answered in a tone of protest which bordered close on sulkiness.

"Rot! Of course, you can! Any thing does."

Macrae spoke kindly, but firmness might be heard behind the softness.

"I've forgotten everything," Russell answered doggedly; and Lycidas could not help admiring him.

"Oh, no, you haven't. You're not so old as all that! Buck up. 'God save the King' will do; you must know that."

"I haven't sung for three years."

Russell spoke in lofty tones. Now at Shrewsbury, "lift" or "roll" (which Eric's bully would have termed "conceit") is counted the least venial of vices. Macrae's tone changed suddenly.

"Look here, Russell, it's no good talking like that. I dare say you were no end of a swell at your last school, and I hope you will be, here, some day; but just at present you're a new kid, and it's a custom that every new kid sings or

takes the consequences. So buck up, unless you want a swiping."

There was silence for some seconds, but no sound came from Russell.

"I say, this is beastly slow," cried Hollins. "I'm getting chilly here."

"Are you going to sing, Russell?" Macrae asked, firmly. "It's no good sulking—just one verse of anything. Song or swiping?"

"I tell you I *can't* sing," Russell answered in a stubborn tone.

"Well, then, just bring me my hair-brush off the washstand."

"Ah, ha! An execution," gloated Hollins.

Lycidas, whose heart was beating wildly with the tension of the scene, saw Russell cross the window, a dim silhouette, and fumble, a white figure, on the dark washstand, then cross once more to Macrae's bed.

"Here! Nearer here! Bend over there," he heard the monitor say.

Then four sharp slaps "were borne upon the still night air."

To Lycidas, sore with jealousy of Russell, each was as a drop of soothing balm.

## CHAPTER VI

### 'DOWLING'

THE fourth day found Lycidas with his faith in the school story book but little shaken. No doubt they had misled him once or twice—there were naturally little differences between various schools, such as in the way of reading the new order—but there were certain general principles that held of all. The criminal nature of the French master, he decided after careful watch, was probably not one; but he felt no doubt as to the football. So far as he remembered, in every book the hero had done famously in his first game. True, he had never played: but he could not remember that the others were recorded to be skilful players. He waited anxiously for his first game. Kelly told him that new boys often got a game on Saturday; but anyhow there would be one on Monday.

“There’s dowling then,” he added.

Lycidas longed to know what dowling was, but did not like to ask. He had learnt, indeed, that

questions bored the other two, and McCormick, who, as a popular athlete, was seldom in the study, had swiped him during Sunday lock-ups for the practice.

"You're like a beastly kid," he had remarked, and perhaps because of that fact he had not hit him very hard.

Lycidas had not yet discovered that Kelly was a mild, unathletic, and proportionately unpopular, creature, who would not raise his hand against a fly; so though he longed to ask of "dowling," he restrained his tongue.

Now herein may be perceived a mild plea for the Classics, since a smattering of them might have led him to a guess. Shrewsbury, as fits an ancient school, is classic in its slang (are not the despised Day Boys called Skytes—"Scythians" or "outcasts"?) and "dowling" is close to the Greek word for slave. And he who watches dowling may not doubt as to the derivation. There are many rules about the Shrewsbury game, which centre largely round "off-side," but what strikes an observer is the disposition of the players. Any number from three hundred down (or up) can play a dowling, but it often happens that in reality some half-dozen punt the ball from end to end, while all the rest troop after it, like soldier-slaves round the great warriors of Ilium. And dowling is compulsory. It is a two-fold

slavery! But Lycidas Marsh knew no Greek; he had to wonder, until Monday.

It was with much curiosity that he went, after second lesson, into the great changing-room and began to change. He was astounded to find the room so full; boys seemed everywhere, trying to find their own or some one else's shirts, rummaging in piles of boots, or staggering about with one boot caught up in their flannel trousers. Lycidas had expected to find just a few; he thought eleven the number. At a guess he should say there were almost forty present, and Alton's strength is forty-five.

House dowling, he was yet to learn, is compulsory for all but "Firsts" or Monitors.

The ground itself, upon the other hand, looked small to him, and when the players all stood in their places, half the field seemed covered. He had gathered from his reading that the thing was to stop the ball and then kick it on; but if there were so many players, how should he get near it?

When, however, Hollins touched the ball, and every one converged upon him, Lycidas revised his notion. All the smaller boys formed into one great surging mass, which trailed some way behind the ball (as kicked by the crack players), like an aimless comet. The ball buzzed to and fro, often high in the air. Lycidas no longer

wondered how he should get near it. He wondered how he should avoid it.

Hollins seemingly suspected other players of sharing this last object, for he often cried, "Oh, *do* play up! You're simply running after it."

Half-time came, and Lycidas at least was warm.

He had not, he feared, so far covered himself with distinction. His nice new boots had, in fact, only touched the ball twice, for a moment. What was he to do?

If he could not distinguish himself by his play, could he not at least get injured, like Tom Brown?

He suddenly changed his tactics, and made efforts to get in the path of the flying ball. At last he was rewarded: it left Hollins' foot, when Lycidas was three short yards in front.

Now for fame and glory! Now over his prostrate form, they should say, as of Tom, "Well, he is a plucky youngster, and will make a player!"

But at the crucial instant, he flinched; he did not want to be hurt too much! He twisted swiftly round, and the ball caught him in no very bony portion of his back. Lycidas fell like a stone.

The effect of the accident rather disappointed him. It was not so much that the game went on

—perhaps some had not noticed—but from those near he thought he heard a titter.

His mother had always told him that it was not kind to laugh at the sufferings of others.

Hollins cried "Play on!" and stooped to look at the victim's face.

"Get up, you silly little ass," he cried. "Don't rag!"

And Lycidas got up.

He was glad when dowling finished, and at the word every boy upon the field dashed off to get first turn at swilling. He could not fail to see that he had not been a success. Many of the boys laughed as they looked at him. He wished that he knew how to limp.

Above all, he thought poorly of the sport of dowling.

With football proper, it was different. The junior House games, played by boys of his own size and with eleven a-side, made more appeal to him. He saw how Russell's neat play was admired, and he burned to rival him. The glamour of the game, too, began to cast its spell about him.

He said as much to Kelly, in the study. Kelly, quiet, friendless, did not disdain the company of the "new scum" one year his junior, and Lycidas confided to him his ambitions. He

was anxious to get good at football.

"A jolly good thing to do," said Kelly.

Lycidas was encouraged. "I want to be as good as all of you."

"Oh, you'll soon be better than me—every one who starts is better in a fortnight. I never should be good at games—I don't care for them. I'm fond of riding, you know, and fishing, but not footer and cricket, and that's all men care for here. You'll be popular if you're a tweak at games, Marsh. I never shall be. Every one calls me a sap, because I only play when I've got to. They think I work, when I'm not playing, but I don't. I read stories. I'm not a bit of a sap." Kelly spoke as though rebutting a vile accusation: to be a sap comes second in the list of Shrewsbury vices. Presently, staring at his desk, he began again as though not knowing how to stop.

"It's beastly rot sometimes. No one seems to want to know me, just because I'm no good at games, and Old Alton says I'll never have enough influence to be a monitor—all because I wear spectacles and am thought a sap. I'd give anything to be good at games, but it's no good. I can't be."

He stopped abruptly, and went very red. Why had he told that young ass Marsh all this which he had never breathed to any one? In two terms Marsh would be good at games and look



down upon him, like the rest ; probably would tell every one what he had said. In that moment, he felt utter scorn for Marsh—and for himself. Boys, at least, do not bore each other with unfoldings of their soul.

Lycidas, too, felt quite uneasy : it was as though Kelly had raised a cover and shown him something which he should not see. No remark would come to him.

At last he remembered a phrase that he had heard used once of himself, and once, probably, of Hollins.

“ Rough luck ! ” he said.

## CHAPTER VII

### HOMERIC HAPPENINGS

LYCIDAS could not delude himself into the belief that he was in any sense "cock of the school"; indeed, he was not even popular. McCormick tolerated him as one might tolerate a dog; Russell was scornfully friendly, but once his personal attractions were proved to accompany athletic prowess, went more and more with his seniors; and several small boys talked to Lycidas, but did not seem to like him much. Lastly there was Kelly, amiable enough; but for him Lycidas had never felt the same since that confession in the study. He was never quite comfortable with Kelly, now. One never knew when he would start like that again!

Now with this sense of loneliness was borne what novelty had kept at bay—home-sickness. He began to feel that nobody here cared for him at all, and he began to long for home. He made a calendar, and ticked the slow days off upon it until some jovial spirits, in search of a "rag,"

turned all his photographs with their backs to the wall and tore his calendar to pieces. Lycidas came in, very miserable, and found them so.

After this the illness grew upon him. He could not trust himself to open at the breakfast-table the precious letters with his mother's well-known writing on them ; but would slip them in his pocket, gulp down his porridge, and hurry to his empty study to choke over them.

Twice, too, he broke down at something which reminded him. The first time, late for call-over and timorous of his first penal visit to the master, he opened Mr. Alton's door and was met with the smell of roses. The odour, unfamiliar at Shrewsbury, so familiar at home, brought back the image of his mother, and he burst into tears. Mr. Alton did not understand, read it as fear, forgave the offence, and tried to calm him by soothing talk before he let the next boy in.

The other incident took place before a less sympathetic audience. Lycidas, a treasured letter pressed within his pocket, was being ragged by Russell and other new boys on some trivial point. Already wretched, he had much ado to keep from crying ; and when the servant leant across, smiling, and handed him his tea, the deed was done. Lycidas, with youth's latent sentimentality, reflected that she would not tease *him* ; then, to complete the chain, that she was

a woman, like his mother—and at that thought the tears refused to ebb.

Russell and his allies were delighted. They bombarded Lycidas with “Did’ums, then?” and such remarks, till he retreated. Next day, in the Psalms, Russell caught at some phrase about putting one’s tears in a bottle, and shrieked it triumphantly at Lycidas for days to come. This, before an audience; but when alone, he was as nice to him as ever.

Lycidas, in fact, began to be a butt, and though he could not see the cause, had sense enough to realize the fact in part.

He puzzled long about it.

It seemed to him that he had done everything that Eric, Tom, or John had done, with altogether different results. Or was there something which he had omitted?

Of course there was! How stupid of him! He had not punished the school bully!

But here came the difficulty. Who was the school bully? He had been ragged by various people, and received two swipings; but he could not light on any one boy and definitely call him the school bully. How vague they were at Shrewsbury! Still, somebody must know; he would inquire.

Meantime, what to do with him when found? The first thing was to make a fight, or, even less

risky, to kick the bully so hard that he would not care to fight. He seemed to remember John doing this. He unlocked his play box, and took out *The Hill*. He had kept his books to himself since the day when he had mentioned *Eric* to McCormick, to be met with scornful laughter. But he still had faith; he turned the pages till he reached the scene.

Yes, John had kicked the hulking "lubber," and Cæsar, too, had defied the great boy twice his size. Yet how had it all ended? The lubber "passed slowly out of the yard and out of these pages. He never persecuted John again." How simple it all seemed! But suddenly his eye caught an asterisk, and down below a note.

"\* Small boys are not advised to copy John's tactics. The victory is not always to the weak."

This annoyed Lycidas. What was the use of a story if you could not act upon it? If the thing was unlikely, why did the Vachell fellow make it happen? Lycidas ranged himself, unconsciously, with the critical opponents of footnotes to fiction.

Still he would risk it! In any case, so far as he saw, bullies never beat the new boys, when it came to fighting; and besides, just possibly, there might be no school bully. If so, he would get all the glory without any of the risk.

*He waited till McCormick had a large brew in*

number ten. Hollins was there, and others of the sporting "tweaks": McCormick was no unimportant person, for all his youth, in Alton's—he played often for the House in both the footer and the cricket. Lycidas, to his delight, was allowed to be present. He had been busy for an hour carrying chairs, borrowing cups, getting milk and doing sundry minor jobs; but this did not always mean that he should reap the fruits of labour. On this occasion, however, McCormick had let him stay, partly doubtless with a view to menial duties.

There were ten boys present, and nowhere save in a Shrewsbury study could so many people crowd into so small a space. On the desks, pipes, ventilator, on the window-sill aloft, boys perched, and the air was heavy with the savour of cocoa and mixed biscuits. The term was yet young, as terms go, and cake and cash still plentiful. Every one was absolutely happy. Nothing tastes so excellent in after-life as do the humblest things at study-brew.

There was little noise until the eating part was over; and this not only because youth's eating makes for silence, but because it would be a vile calamity, should premature songs bring Old Alton in to clear the study, before brewing finished. But when every one had done—or rather when the buns were done—McCormick sang out—

"I say, Marsh, you might put some of the cups away, in case they're broken."

"Oh, is friend Marsh there?" asked Hollins, from his lowly play-box seat. He had not spoken to Lycidas since the incident at his first dowing. Marsh, emerging, blushed at the word "friend." So Hollins had forgiven him!

"Well, have you done any more great exploits since your footer gallery?" inquired the Captain.

Lycidas had no idea of what a gallery might be: he was not an adept in the slang of sport. He merely answered, "No, not yet."

"Oh, oh, not *yet*. Well, what's to be the next?" Had Hollins been born to the eighteenth century, "smoking" people would have been his chief delight.

Lycidas felt his blood quicken. The chance which he desired had made itself. He would show no hesitation, but go straight at the matter.

"Who is the school bully?" he asked, with a majestic air, as who should say, "Bring him before me!"

"The school bully!" exclaimed McCormick, in contempt. "Why, you little——"

"S-sh!" said Hollins, with a wink which was lost to Lycidas. "Cormy doesn't know: he's too big to be bullied: but I've seen. And I'll tell you who it is: he's in this House. It's—*Hobbs*. But why?"

Lycidas saw an amused smile, half hid, upon the faces of those around him. So they thought Hobbs was too big for him! They doubted of his valour! Well, they would see.

"I mean to fight him," he said, simply.

It was as he thought. He could see that they politely wished to hide their doubt, but they could not. One by one, they began to smile, and the smile grew to laughter, long and loud. Only Hollins still looked serious.

"No, no, Marsh, you mustn't," he said, gravely. "Hobbs is very big, and he might hurt you."

"Where is the fighting ground?" asked Lycidas, doggedly. Tom Brown, he remembered, had been shown this ground on the first day.

Hollins seemed to hesitate whether he should tell him, and McCormick cried out, "I say, dry up, Holly!" Then to Lycidas, "Why, there's no——"

"McCormick knows nothing about it," interrupted Hollins. "He's too beastly good-natured: he never goes to fights. I'll tell you, though. You know the School wall, don't you?"

"Yes," said Lycidas, immensely keen.

"Well, it's just behind that, next to the new Stinks room. It's rather lucky for you, too: Hobbs always takes the poor little devils he wants to bully to that very spot, just after breakfast. We can't interfere, you know, though



we 'cut' him, but if you'll give him a good licking, we'll all back you up. Won't we?" and everybody cried, "Oh, yes!" But Lycidas noted that some of them still smiled. Perhaps they had not realized the cowardice of bullies.

He was certainly surprised. He knew Hobbs by sight, and had never suspected the great flabby creature to be anything but harmless, nor had he observed that Hollins and the others "cut" him specially. Still, Hollins must be right. Besides, bullies always *were* great hulking lubbers.

Lycidas would have been a great deal more surprised had he seen Hollins, brewing over, go straight to the study of the hated Hobbs, or could he have heard the laughter which floated through the ventilator, laughter of Hollins mingled with the fat, good-humoured laugh of Hobbs.

This was one of the things that Lycidas **Marsh** failed to see or hear.

He set out, all alone, after breakfast the next morning, somewhat nervous, but charged with a great resolve. There were twenty minutes yet to ten o'clock, and he took his second-lesson books with him. What would those minutes bring forth?

He walked quickly to the School wall, and then tried to determine which was the exact spot *named* by Hollins.

The School wall is a low, bending, stone erection, scarred with the amateur carvings, old and new, of countless boys, each of whom must perforce have won celebrity at games. On this well-loved wall, rescued from the old site when the Schools moved up the hill, there stands, for all to see, a record of those boys who soared to glory in this world of sport. The social philosopher might like to know how many of them rose to fame in the large outer world, where games are merely rest from the day's labour.

Lycidas certainly did not concern himself with such a thought. He passed behind the wall and looked around. This part of the site is favoured by the builder's art. The majestic baths, the humble carpentering shop, the even humbler Morris range, the fine new science building, the tiny pagoda-like dark room—these all jostle side by side in true Republican broad-mindedness.

Hollins had said, "Between the wall and the new Stinks room." Lycidas knew that the science building was but lately built, yet why should it be called the Stinks room?

Lycidas had done no science.

And while he hesitated, he saw a sight which served at once to dissipate his doubt and to confirm his purpose.

Close behind the dark room he descried a thick-set figure. There could be no doubt about

him. It was Hobbs! As Lycidas strode nearer, he could see that Hobbs was holding at arm's length a little boy, and in his other hand there was a stick—a pliant stick, new-plucked, with cruel little lumps along it.

So Hollins had been right! Lycidas walked quickly forward, and when he was within a few steps, the little boy began to whimper and to cry, "Oh, don't! Hobbs, don't!" He could not help noticing that Hobbs had not done any thing so far; but possibly the poor boy cried from past experience.

Lycidas knew what to say; not for nothing had he studied *Eric*.

"Leave him alone," he shouted. "What a confounded bully you are—always plaguing some one."

"Clear out!" answered Hobbs, rudely.

Then indeed Lycidas opened his mouth and let flow Eric's words, which he so prudently had underlined.

"You hulking, cowardly, stupid bully!" he cried. "You blackguard! You despicable bully! You intolerable brute!" and he added (from *The Hill*), "Infernal jackanapes! You pretty pet!"

Hobbs certainly seemed staggered, but there was the suspicion of a scornful smile around his lips, as letting go of the small boy, he said—

"Look here! Do you want to fight?"

Lycidas did not flinch. "Yes, I *do*," he cried, stripping off his coat. He thought that he detected signs of emotion on the bully's face, as he did likewise.

When the scene had begun, the field, well hidden by the wall and buildings, had been empty nor had any one been visible; but almost with its first words boys, mainly of Mr. Alton's House, appeared as if by some magic prescience from behind every adjoining wall, and by now some forty boys stood round the two contestants. This did not surprise Lycidas. It always had been so; Lycidas could remember, in all his reading, no fight where there had not been an audience. Usually they had cried, "A mill! A mill!" and formed a ring.

They formed a ring now, but they did not cry, "A mill! A mill!" One or two boys shouted, "Go it, Hobbs!" but Hollins said, with emphasis, as if to correct them, "Go it, *Marsh!*" and then more cried, "Go it, Marsh!"

Lycidas was glad, indeed, to have won the patronage of Hollins.

Meanwhile, Hobbs was ready, with his cuffs turned back, displaying pulpy muscles, and Lycidas squared up to him.

"Time," Hollins cried.

At the word, Lycidas dashed in impetuous fury at his great adversary. That, he remembered,

was what small boys always did. But how was he to reach his face? Hobbs loomed huge above him, and he half repented. Still, he made dash after dash; but Hobbs' hand always seemed to foil him. It caught him just below his chin, upon his chest, not roughly (Hobbs could not be very strong), but with firmness, pushing him back each time until his foe was out of reach.

Never mind! Perhaps he could tire him out.

And as these thoughts flashed through his mind, the hand seemed of a sudden to grip tightly, no longer to rest merely on his chest, and another hand gripped him behind. In a second he was hugged by Hobbs and being drawn back through the ring! Surely this was not allowed? None of the bullies had behaved like this.

But worse was to come.

Hobbs carried him, without an effort, till he reached a spot where two stray blocks of stone stood one upon the other. Here he sat down, and laid Lycidas tenderly across his knee. Three gentle smacks he gave him, and then put him down. "I think that's Time," he said, and laughed.

Lycidas was more than overcome with shame. To be vanquished so easily! . . . And now, ghastly thought, he was henceforth at the bully's *mercy*! He had made an enemy of Hobbs.

All the world seemed full of buzzing, and the ring of faces reeled in swaying unison. But as he came back to himself, Lycidas realized that they were laughing. They were not sorry that he had failed to down the bully! Or must they feign delight?

This for a moment, but in the next—was not Hollins clapping Hobbs upon the back? What was it that he was saying?

“Good man, Fatty! You did it A1. You’re a second Garrick!”

In an instant of deadly sickness, Lycidas had grasped the truth. He had made a fool of himself again, and this time everybody knew.

“You’ve a big heart, Marsh!” said Hollins, not unkindly, as he strolled away. The other boys trooped after him, for a last stroll before second lesson. On the whole they were a little disappointed; the fight had not been half so funny as they hoped.

But if its object had been to humiliate Marsh, the thing had been a huge success. Lycidas, left alone, collected his books, trampled on by the ring of boys, and waited in pure misery behind the wall, dreading to venture forth, hoping that no one would come back to him.

If Hobbs would have knocked him down, or used the stick on him, it would not have been so

bad. To be taken up and spanked gently, like a baby! That was what had hurt his dignity.

Oh, why had he been such a fool? And how could they be so unkind? Thank goodness, there was nobody to see his tears. He dreaded entering his form-room. Everybody would know the joke, and he could hear the titter as he came in. He was sure his eyes would still be red.

He waited till his watch made it two minutes to the hour, then he hurried out.

Hollins was standing on the stone square by the door, with a laughing crowd around him.

"It was rather rough luck, really," he heard Hollins say, as he dashed by.

Everything seemed rough luck—afterwards.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SCENE THAT FAILED

As it chanced, however, this disastrous onslaught upon the person of the school bully had, in a large degree, the effects desired by Lycidas. It made him more popular.

The notion that the hoax had been "rather bad luck" spread rapidly, and it is the Briton's universal instinct to sympathize with bad luck's victims. Nor could the spectators, ignorant as they were of his motive, fail to admire the new boy's pluck in tilting at the towering figure of the genial Hobbs. Hollins christened him Don Quixote, a nickname soon shortened by a student of the cheaper fiction to Don Q.

Once a boy has gained a nickname which is not totally an insult, he has won some way up the steep hill of popularity.

Lycidas found that boys, both of his own standing and of some terms' seniority, began more and more to seek his company. That blind credulity which, by veiling life's un-



pleasant truths, forms the paradise of Youth, hid from him largely the fact that he was the House's buffoon. He was genuinely pleased at his success. School life began to take on brighter hues, and he thought less of home.

The first direct result of the great fight was that it suggested to the Hall Constable the necessity for some hall boxing.

Hall boxing is an ancient custom, and members of humane societies might rashly set it down a relic of a brutal age. Even members of humane societies can err: and hall boxing, if not a wonderfully exhilarating, is at least an altogether harmless custom. Gloves are provided, and the younger boys, putting them on for the first time mostly, throw their arms about and receive in the process a maximum amount of exercise, combined with a minimum of blows. The older boys, seated on the drawn-back tables round the wall, find for the most part more appeal to their risible, than to their vicious, emotions. Usually, however, there is enough effectual result for the decision as to who has won: and while the winner gains confidence, the loser probably benefits by a stimulus to his ambition.

Not much is expected of the novice at hall boxing. Dissatisfaction arises only when, as hap-

pens, the two warriors have obviously covenanted not to hit each other!

Lycidas had been matched with another new boy, called Evans, a lanky, pale-faced creature, more lightly made, but several inches taller. The audience stirred when the Hall Constable cried, "Marsh and Evans." There were shouts of "Don Q.," and a stamping of feet upon the forms. Lycidas blushed, and gave a little bow. He was resolved, if possible, to wipe out the memory of his fight with Hobbs. Evans had suggested that they should only pretend to hit, but Lycidas had totally refused: he said that it did not seem right. Clearly Evans was afraid of him! The great point, now, was to make him still more nervous. He struck an attitude, fumbled with his gloves, kept rising on one heel, all with the tired air of one who knows. The boys began to laugh. Perhaps they had already seen that Evans here had met his match.

At the Hall Constable's word, Lycidas dashed forward, swinging his arms wildly like a semaphore beyond control. The astounded Evans backed, and then backed further, and still Lycidas came on. His windmill action aroused laughter and applause. He smiled grimly. How did Evans relish his disgrace? Lycidas remembered how they had once jeered at *him*. He pressed always on, untiring arms revolving as if

urged by clockwork. But Evans always backed, his eye cocked over his shoulder, to avoid the benches.

Their progress suggested less a boxing conflict than a new-invented barn-dance.

Lycidas was just hoping to get his first blow in at Evans, when the Constable called Time. There was a roar of laughter, and the Constable cried, "Marsh wins!" The evening was far spent; it seemed best to get to more effectual fights.

Amid applause, whistles, cries of "Good old Don Q.," and every kind of uproar, Lycidas put on his coat, and his head light with the champagne of success, regained his seat. Russell and his other neighbour smacked him on the back, and said, "Good man!"

This night strengthened his popularity. Nobody had made a keener rush: every one agreed that Marsh was a sportsman. Every one added that he was a fool.

Even Russell, who had begun to drift further and further from him into the company of bigger boys, took to walking with him once again. After all, he reflected, Lycidas was rather fun: and the fellows in the end studies liked to hear new things about him.

As to Lycidas, he was charmed that Russell should be friendly to him once more. He was

no longer lonely, but Russell was so clever, knew so much. Besides, Mr. Alton had specially warned him against Russell.

“I’m glad to see you making friends, Marsh,” he had said, one day, when Lycidas was in his study; “especially Kelly, a splendid fellow if only he would just try to get good at games. He won’t believe me when I say he will never have any influence without them. Try to make him play, Marsh, there’s a good fellow. *Mens sana in corpore sano*—you know the proverb?”

“Yes, sir,” lied Lycidas, unthinking.

Mr. Alton leant back in his chair and examined Lycidas. He did not fail to see that he was something of a butt in the house, yet he feared to say anything, so soon. Better let things take their course a little: he had learnt that sudden changes frequently incline towards the worse. One term was not much, and he had faith in Lycidas. The present phase was not due to the boy, but to his mother. Mr. Alton abandoned the idea of warning him against credulity.

“And who are your other friends?” he asked, after a long silence, in which Lycidas stared at the fire—the wonted target of a boy’s eyes in a master’s study.

Lycidas stammered out a few names, some of which strained the sense of the word friendship; and amongst them Russell.

“M, Russell! *Why* Russell?” Mr. Alton asked the question more to himself than to Lycidas, whose answers were commonly limited to monosyllables. And indeed, now, he did not even answer so much; he stared at the fire. It was Mr. Alton who spoke first.

“Russell is a splendid fellow” (everybody in his House was that), “but not quite the sort of boy that I want to be your friend. I want Marsh to become a *tweak*” (sarcastic emphasis upon the slang) “at games, but I also count on Marsh as one of my monitors some day. There’s no harm in Russell, but—well, he is wild, he takes no interest in anything except his games. I want you to be a clever man, like your good father.” The good father’s poems, a complimentary copy, lay uncut upon the window table.

Lycidas was stirred by this conversation. Mr. Alton knew boy-nature sufficiently well to be able to inspire ambition, and Lycidas left his study burning with the desire, first to be a monitor, and then, like his father, to be thought a clever man. But what Mr. Alton had not grasped is that to warn a boy against anything is perhaps the surest form of commendation.

From that moment Russell had for Lycidas a new and rather spurious attraction. He was *not* desirable. There was no real harm in him—





Photo F. B. Arnyhope

"ONE OF THE FINEST FIELDS IN ENGLAND IS GIVEN EXPRESSLY FOR THAT PURPOSE"

that might have frightened Lycidas—but well, he was not quite the sort of boy that one should know. He circled round Russell, looking curiously at him, like a moth about a flame.

Russell made no elaborate attempts to keep him, but he took a subtle delight in leading Marsh, whom he always associated with Eric, into mild forms of mischief. There was something ridiculous in the sight of Marsh, when breaking rules.

This hobby led to one dramatic scene.

Games of ball are somewhat naturally forbidden in Shrewsbury houses, seeing that one of the finest fields in England is expressly given for that purpose, and that further, the adaptation of the study-corridor to this end is likely to interfere with its more ordinary uses.

It was a beautiful, crisp morning, and every one was out of doors, shooting at goal or playing football in a more organized form. In any other circumstances it would have been unpardonable "lift" for a new boy to monopolize a passage, and this Russell knew. But all was silence, and as he left number ten with Lycidas, he threw him a fives ball to catch, gradually backing until they were some large distance apart; and thus they threw from one to the other. Lycidas scarcely remembered that he was breaking a



rule, and had he remembered, would not have dared to say so to Russell. He was a less militant Eric in these days ; he had been eight weeks at school.

Russell, near the House entrance, suddenly shouted "look out!" and disappeared within a study. The ball had already left Lycidas' hand, but he too dashed behind the nearest door. But in that instant he had seen the corner of a "mortar-board" hat loom round the corner.

"Who threw that ball?" came in the House Master's voice. Mr. Alton had been sitting with those kept-in on half-hour "detentions."

Lycidas made no movement: he trusted to Russell to direct him—he would do as he did. There was silence in the corridor. Lycidas imagined he could hear Mr. Alton give a little sigh, as if to say, "Very well"; next retreating steps; and then the study door slammed.

Mr. Alton did not care to do detective work: it was not necessary. The boy would own up presently. It is to be noted that he never for a moment suspected that the ball had been aimed at him: it is only tyrants who read plots in everything.

Lycidas stood where he was, and presently heard swift steps along the passage. Russell entered with amazement on his face.

"You never owned up!"

"Well, *you* didn't either!" answered Lycidas.

"No, but *I* never threw the thing."

Lycidas was staggered; this had not occurred to him.

"Ought I to have owned up?" he asked.

"Of course you ought." Then, noticing the other's face, he added: "Still now you've lain low, you may as well go on. The Dook will probably forget it." "The Dook" was a pet name, of cryptic origin, for Mr. Alton.

However, he did not forget about it. It was his chief pride that, whenever any window was broken, the breaker always came in with regrets, before the evening. He plumed himself upon his House's honour, and this thing puzzled him. Broken windows were, of course, different from broken rules; he did not expect boys to inform against themselves on this last point. But he had asked a question, and looked for an answer.

Still, he waited; the boy would probably come after lunch. When third lesson passed, and still no one appeared, he wrote a notice and put it upon the board. It was not often he wrote such a notice.

"Unless the boy who threw a fives ball down the study-passage this morning, comes to my study before 10 p.m. to-night, 'brewing' will be stopped to-morrow." Brewing is effectually stopped by turning off the gas-stove, for it is

a defect in electric light, which all the studies boast, that it will not heat tea or coffee within a reasonable period of time.

Lycidas was one of the first to read the notice and retired to number ten, his head whirling with emotions. He must own up now; he quite saw that. Oh, why had he not done so sooner? Why had he ever thrown the ball? What would Mr. Alton say? What would all the boys say? He remembered such cases in some of his books, and the boy had been sent into coventry. In *Eric*, when the boy had not owned up, he had been tried by jury, witnesses and counsel, before the whole school, and, thanks to the defence of the wrongly-accused Eric by a Shell form boy, the "ineffable blackguard" ran the gauntlet of the school five times, was flogged by the Head Master, and then publicly expelled. Lycidas trembled. Would they do all that to him? Perhaps he might be let off with running the gauntlet. After all, the *Eric* boy had stolen, which was worse than throwing a ball down the passage. But was it a very wicked thing not to have owned up? Russell certainly had seemed surprised.

While he tortured himself with these problems, Russell himself entered, smiling gaily as though nothing terrible had happened, and said—

"Well, I see you're nipped!" He glanced at



Lycidas, and then said, "Good Lord, you *do* look blue! What's up?"

"Haven't you seen the notice?"

"Of course I have: that's why I said you're nipped. You'd better go and own up at once,—or have you been?"

Why did Russell not understand? "No, Russell—I don't think I can go. What will he say?—And everybody say? I wish I had owned up this morning." Tears welled to his eyes, and he had much ado to keep them from falling.

They were not lost on Russell, and he was touched. No boy is altogether cruel, altogether sympathetic, altogether good, altogether bad—altogether anything. Boys exhibit every quality in the growing or else in the dying, and Russell was not the exception. Now for the first time, he felt pity for this young Marsh, whom he had made his butt for "greens" and "rags." For one moment he realized that what had been farce for all at Alton's might often have been close to tragedy for the deluded Lycidas.

"Buck up, Marsh!" he said. "Why, it's nothing: it'll soon be over. The Dook'll only give you two detentions, and he'll let you off if you look like that!"

"But the House!" wailed Lycidas, and at the thought his two tears dropped.

"The House! They'll think you rather a

sportsman. You don't suppose they want a man to be a prig, do you?"

"Oh, it's different for you!" Lycidas broke out fiercely. "You're popular, but I don't know the tweaks at all."

"Look here, Marsh," said Russell, on an impulse, "if you'll do the 'strues for three days—I hate that beastly Cæsar—I'll go to Old Alton and say I threw the ball. So I did, too, just before," he added: boys are peerless casuists.

"You won't?" cried Lycidas. He got up, with a new light shining in his eyes. This was a fresh side in Russell, and to his sentimental, book-fed nature it seemed something infinitely noble, almost worthy of the other Russell.

"Yes, I will: it'll be rather a rag, and I'll probably get round him. I'll go now. But mind, you've promised to sap out the 'strues, and 'strue them to me!"

With which unheroic words, he vanished.

Lycidas felt that a great load had left him. That was his first feeling, of relief; but in the next moment he thought of Russell. Russell was at this moment in with Mr. Alton, and later he would have to face the House—and for a fault which he had not committed!

Minutes passed, and he did not return. Mr. Alton, having told him not to do such a stupid *thing* again, having announced the confiscation

of the ball, and having expressed his disappointment that Russell had not owned up until forced to do so, seized the chance of giving him a lengthy lecture on his general course of life. *Mens sana in corpore sano* was quoted again, but with the accent upon *Mens* in this case.

Lycidas could not guess this, and disturbed himself with vain imaginings. He fancied Mr. Alton pouring all his scorn on Russell, threatening expulsion, predicting life-long distrust, enunciating hideous penalties, and all—for what? No, he could not let it be. It was too great a sacrifice.

He suddenly remembered a scene in *The Hill*, which had raised his dramatic feelings to their highest pitch, the scene where John Verney, just like Russell, had taken a wrong action upon himself to save his friend, Desmond. The master, firm in faith of John, had been upset. Then—how did it go? Lycidas took out the treasured book and read the scene through hastily—

“Suddenly the door was flung open and Desmond burst into the room, with a complete disregard of the customary proprieties, and rushed up to Warde.

“‘Sir,’ he said, ‘Verney did this to save—*me!*’

“Warde saw the slow smile break upon John’s face. And, seeing it, he came as near hysterical

laughter as a man of his character and temperament can come. . . . The relief was so stupendous that the tutor flung himself back into a chair, gasping. Desmond spoke quietly. . . .

“ ‘The Lord be praised !’ said Warde.”

Lycidas, even in this moment, thrilled at the incident. And Warde, in his relief, had let both off! He did not wait to close the book, but dashed along the passage to the master’s door. This, as had Desmond, he burst open without any knock, and cried with all the vehemence that he could muster—

“ Sir ! Verney—I mean, Russell—did this to save—*me* ! ”

Mr. Alton did not laugh, nor did he cry “ The Lord be praised ! ”

Certainly he saw a slow smile break on Russell’s face ; and at the sight, he suspected a vast, unprecedented “ rag ” concerted by these two.

“ What does all this nonsense mean ? ” he asked quietly. Mr. Alton had never been seen to lose his temper. The gravest offences seemed to produce in him only a kind melancholy.

Neither of them answered.

“ Well, Marsh ? What does this mean, your bursting into my room like this, without knocking ? ”

Lycidas thought that he did not seem very relieved.

"Please, sir," he stuttered, "I—it was I who—I threw that ball!"

Mr. Alton spoke rather more sternly. "Why did you not come and report yourself at once? Why has Russell come? Silly fellows! I shall punish you both for this tomfoolery. Go to your studies."

Outside, once safely round the corner in the passage, Russell seized Lycidas by the shoulders and, for the first time, kicked him violently. Next day, they were each credited with three detentions. Russell, on the strength of this, made Lycidas extend his 'struing services to six more mornings' work.

"I wish I had owned up at once," said that last worthy, ruefully. It is in such devious ways that life often elects to bring its healthy morals home!

The affair, which in an hour was the joke of the season, had another good effect on Lycidas. This was the last time that he went to his school story books for guidance. Hereafter some of his actions might be dictated by their influence: for past knowledge, like past behaviour, must bring its bitter fruits to harvest. Lycidas was still the prey of the dramatic impulse, still somewhat pleased with his own self, still a little of a prig: but never again would he go to these books, in the old simple way, for help.



He put them up on the top shelf of his desk, and not for many terms did he displace them.

He felt, indeed, a certain resentment against them : they had helped him little, and their last exploit had been to embitter Mr. Alton, whom he admired so much. For Lycidas honestly believed, for a while, that his House Master now disliked, distrusted him. Mr. Alton, in truth, had soon forgotten what he took to be a rather puzzling, certainly harmless, piece of youthful folly, and his manner to Lycidas was just what it had always been. But Lycidas fancied that he looked on him with a new coldness.

Soon, however, thoughts of home drove everything away. Term was ending ! The uncrossed days in his new calendar formed one white speck against a smudge of black.

Lycidas decided that these days well atoned for all the others of the term. Home-sickness had gone, but the desire for home survived. As the actual day came nearer, everybody seemed to grow more genial. Examinations lost their terror, when seen to be a prelude to the holidays. The School concert with its rolling choruses and cheers for those Salopians, old and young, who had won fame—cheers which roused Lycidas to new ambitions—this was very wonderful, but behind it all he saw the holidays, and home !

*He soon ceased to brood on Mr. Alton's anger,*

and when, for the second time, Mrs. Alton asked him in to tea, he felt that her husband must have got over his annoyance. Mrs. Alton, who had no children to help her, was very kind, and showed him, as before, some most ingenious clockwork toys. Nine weeks earlier, Lycidas had revelled in them : but now he felt vaguely ashamed. They seemed to him rather childish, just a little *infra dig.* !

Finally, the "first day list" was posted up. Shrewsbury breaks up on two days, a custom which tradition traces to coaching times, when the rush of boys put too much strain upon the travelling arrangements. Now, however, just as merit money is solemnly distributed to encourage work, second day is used to discourage punishments : those who have acquired detentions below a certain number, get first day. This number is, to many, something of a fair ideal, and the total of genuine candidates is often less than half the House. The residue is made up of boys who seem to have deserved the favour.

Lycidas knew that, thanks mainly to the fives ball episode, his detentions had risen above the small total allowed by authority. To his delight he found himself assigned first day. This was a clear proof that Mr. Alton had forgiven him.

With all the triumph of one who has defeated

time, Lycidas blacked out the day upon his calendar. His excitement now grew so keen that he found it hard to hide it from his fellows.

Four days—three days—two days—one day—  
THE DAY!

The getting of journey-money, the farewells, the songs and cheering in the train—all passed like a happy dream.

What a different affair from that solitary journey, three long months ago!

And when at last Lycidas felt his mother's arms around him, he knew that all the separation had been worth while, for the joy of this reunion.

But as the days went by, a strange feeling settled on him. He began to tire a little of his mother's ceaseless compliments and petting, of his father's alternate fondness and ill-humour. He longed to match his wits against others of his age, to share their fun, to be treated no more as a baby. The boys of Nofield failed to satisfy him: they all came from other schools.

He began vaguely to feel bored, almost to look forward to the next term, till within six days of it, when he began to dread it.

Shrewsbury was weaving its slow spell about him.

As to his mother, she was disappointed: her *son's* ideas and speeches had become less noble.

He seemed to take an interest in games and other such rough, inartistic things.

She confided, late one evening, in the poet.

“I was always against school for Lycidas, Thomas dear, and I know Shrewsbury has spoilt him a little, already. He is ever so much more like ordinary boys.”

## CHAPTER IX

### MARSH V. THE PRÆPOSTORS

LYCIDAS cried, with an even greater sense of shame, when he left his mother for the second time, but the gradual approach to Shrewsbury had lost much of its former terror. A little nervousness remained, but with it there blended a pulsing desire to be once more in the thick of things, and when at the first junction he saw some of Alton's waiting for the train, it was wonderful to feel their handshake and to hear them say, "Why, here's Don Q.!" They flung their hat-boxes and bags into an empty carriage and guarded its door, to the vast indignation of a swelling widow, till the train went out; and in the buzz of talk, plans for the term, prophecies, memories, criticisms of the masters, Lycidas had soon lost all recollection of the bitter parting. At home, Mrs. Marsh went gloomily about her work, picturing her son still as she had seen him last, fancying the rough horrid boys jeering at his darling tears.

*Perhaps* he was rather quiet for the first few

days, but when all are somewhat chastened, such a circumstance meets no remark. The days went by without Lycidas doing anything beyond the common; he had indeed settled into the unvarying routine; but boys are the most humble of all slaves to convention. Lycidas had gained a reputation as a clown, and it would take terms of ordinary behaviour, before he could hope to lose it. Every one chuckled at the sight of "Old Don Q."

And gradually he cheered up. He had gained his remove in form, and he was not elected Crier, and both heartened him immensely; the one showed him not to be incurably a fool, the other proved that he was not at least the most unpopular of all at Alton's. Lycidas began to "come out," and, as will happen in these first moments of expansion, showed a tendency to come too far.

Russell, though their friendship could not be said to flourish, still felt a contemptuous delight in attempting to lead Lycidas mildly astray. He was no great psychologist, and fancied that breaking rules was to Marsh a hideous nightmare, a needful concession to the low taste of his fellows. This, however, was because, boylike, he still judged Lycidas as the Lycidas of four months back.

"Evans and I have got a grand scheme on," said he, one day. The scheme, in truth, was all

his own, and Evans had only been cajoled into it by threats of torture and by jeers at cowardice.

"Will you help?"

"What is it?" asked the cautious Lycidas. He had heard of, without assisting in, many of Russell's grand schemes.

"Oh, nothing much," answered Russell, modest and wily, "but rather a good thing to do. You know Grouse—old Alton's beast of a dog that barks?"

Lycidas nodded assent. Nobody could sleep a night in Alton's and not know of Grouse.

"Well, that's it. All the fellows bar the beast, and Evans and I want to get rid of him."

"Not *kill* him?" Lycidas exclaimed in horror.

"No, just hoof him out; let him loose and tell him we're fed up with him. He'll bolt—they never let the poor beast out. Will you?"

"But it doesn't want three."

"Oh, yes," said Russell, without hesitation. "We want one to keep Nix, in case we're nipped. Besides," he added, vaguely, "three are much less easily found out." Russell liked to entangle others in his dangers.

Lycidas consented. He bore no love to Grouse. It was not as though Russell meant to drown him, he merely meant to let him loose. It sounded fairly simple and would be rather fun. *Besides*, how glad the House would be! He saw

no chance that he should make a fool of himself over this. He might possibly gain popularity.

“But when will you do it?” he asked.

“Lock-ups to-night,” said Russell. “We’ll get out, and do it, there’s never any one about.”

There are various manners in which boys have been known to elude bolts and bars, nor while Shrewsbury exists, would it be fair to set them forth. Russell, at any rate, knew one of them; and soon after six o’clock he and his partners in crime stood safely outside Alton’s. Lock-ups during the dark months are a long business, and at six o’clock all who are not in their studies are usually safely ensconced in carpenters’ shop or music-room. They stood still for a moment, listening, then crept (as they thought) silently round the house, until they reached the yard where Grouse’s kennel had been placed.

The spaniel is an energetic animal, and Grouse had not been let loose all day. At sight of the three boys he was delighted; perhaps now he would get a run. With his hind legs on the ground, he bounced his body up and down, wriggling slightly sideways, and uttering cavernous sounds of unadulterated joy, till Russell hit him on the head, when he subsided.

Russell knelt down and unfastened the chain from the kennel.



"Gee-up," he said to Grouse: he was not very used to dogs.

But the great beast understood. He really was to have a walk, if only on a chain! He leapt up wildly by his captor's side, and gave vent to a piercing gibber of delight.

Youth's heart is hard, and Russell hit the grateful creature's domed head with the chain. Grouse changed his note and uttered a howl of pain, which died away like the voice of a ventriloquist.

"Hang the brute! Come on!" cried Russell, and the trio sped away, Grouse, with his neck in rucks, sagging at the far end of his chain.

Lycidas breathed more freely, when they got to the central approach: the scheme had nearly reached its end. The idea had been to point Grouse's head straight at the School Gates, then to say "shoo," and give him a kick, when it was supposed that he would bolt and never more be seen of mortal eye. Really, of course, he would have come through the side entrance and returned, in gratitude at an escape, to his dear kennel; but boys' plans, like murderers', commonly embrace one fallacy.

This plan, however, was not to reach the stage of practice. The conspirators, intent upon their deed, heard nothing till upon their ears there struck, "Who's that?"

All three knew the voice. It belonged to Vincent, a præpostor. Now any 'postor is terrible, for he holds power; but none less terrible than Vincent, who gained his rank solely by work and not by influence. Of influence he had but little. He did not play games. At any other voice, the trio would have quaked; at this voice, Russell cried—

“Scoot, quick!”

And scoot they did, with Grouse, delighted at their geniality, close by their side. They could hear that Vincent had not cared to match himself with them for pace, but they could also hear him shouting, “Stop!” and as they turned in at the House entrance, Russell laughed a panting laugh.

Many proverbs show the folly of premature amusement, and, as if to prove their truth, no sooner had Russell laughed than straight before the three there loomed a figure.

It might have been an ordinary boy, who would have been delighted at their escape; it might have been a monitor, who would have swiped them; but it happened to be Parker, and Parker happened to be a præpostor.

“M! Russell, Marsh, and Evans,” said Parker, in his nasty scornful voice, which everybody hated. “Whatever are you doing?”

They had no need to answer. “They were running from me,” panted Vincent. He had seen

which path they took, and was coming, guilelessly, to ask Mr. Alton who was out! Then hearing them stopped, he had run up. "I nipped them outside," he exclaimed in gasps, "and they wouldn't stop."

"Put the dog back," said Parker without a smile, "and get in as you came out. There's no need for Alton to know of this, though I wonder he didn't hear; *we'll* settle the affair."

Grouse began to bounce again at the new start. It had been a short outing, but they had given him a jolly run. If he remembers, he is probably still grateful to those three kind boys. Certainly he has no suspicion of the vile plot hatched against him—nor, for that matter, has his owner!

Parker meanwhile was asking Vincent for further details of the incident. There was not much to tell, but what there was made Parker very angry. What annoyed him had nothing to do with the dog. It did not even occur to him to wonder why they had had the dog with them; it really did not affect the case. They did not seem to have hurt the howling beast, and in any case Alton's dog was Alton's business. What annoyed him was that three new kids should dare to disobey a 'postor. The mere fact of their being out in lock-ups was not much; he might *have given* them four penals (the which, together,

make just one hundred lines), or possibly have swiped them! But that they should run away when told to stop! He knew the reason well enough, and that was what angered him. Vincent had no prestige, and even new kids obviously despised him. He was determined to prove that a præpostor's power did not rest upon his personal qualities or upon his skill at games; he had power, because he was a præpostor. These new scum should learn that Shrewsbury was not like a beastly private school.

Parker thundered down the centre path to the Head of the School.

And next morning, that mighty personage pinned on to the notice board a small square of paper with these words—

“ J. Evans,  
Russell,  
Marsh

will come to the VI Form Room at 9.45  
this morning.”

School begins at ten. He clearly did not look for any length of trial.

Lycidas saw the notice, when he came out of morning school at nine o'clock, and was thus spared a long agony of anticipation; but indeed the forty minutes dragged along. Nobody showed

any sympathy. Every one he met said, "Whew, Don Q., I shouldn't like to be in *your* place!" or rubbed his hand suggestively upon his trousers. Lycidas thought them unkind. Even Russell and Evans, who might have sympathized, gave him no help.

"They *do* swipe in the Sixth, I know," said Russell, "but I shall put a rowing poncho in;" while Evans said, "Oh, I'm all right. They daren't hit me. My pater's president of a Humanitarian League, and told me he'd have any one up, who assaulted me, and I shall tell them so. But *you'll* catch it, Don Q.!"

As they went down the centre path, too, half the House followed them; and on each side of the Sixth Form entrance a small group of other boys had formed already. As the trio drew near, Russell trying to laugh and joke, they saw the Head of the School cross from Doctor's with a bundle of thin canes beneath his arm. They climbed the staircase, with their courage pressing on their knees. Russell had been told of the procedure, and all three leant against the broad window-seat which fronts the passage leading to the Sixth Form door.

Presently this door opened and Prince looked out. Prince was the lowest boy of those entitled to be present, and on him sundry duties fell. For this reason, such a boy is sometimes in-



accurately called *Doulos*, the meaning of which term the Careful Reader (if such still survive) may possibly remember.

"J. Evans," he called.

Evans gave a crooked smile, walked unsteadily along the passage, and disappeared behind the door. Possibly a minute passed, and then the door opened again. Evans, pale, but calm, came towards them.

Lycidas' heart gave a great leap. Were they going to be let off?

"I've appealed to the Head Master," said Evans, and went slowly down the stairs. Lycidas could hear the crowd raise an ironic cheer.

At the same moment Prince appeared again and cried "Russell."

Lycidas was left alone. This was utter torture. Why could he not have been called first? Oh, of course it went in school order! His thoughts turned insensibly to *Eric* and that awful trial; but he dragged them back. He had no notion what this trial would be like, but he would only answer questions, would not make proposals. It was probably quite different from that in *Eric*.

A conclusion, which goes to show how Lycidas' logic was improving.

Suddenly the door opened, and Russell appeared. Had he, too, appealed? No, Prince

was with him, and the two passed into the Modern Second. Lycidas was frankly puzzled.

He did not learn till later that it falls beneath the duties of the so-called Doulos to take suspects into the next form-room and there to strip them of ponchos, pads, and other such unusual articles of attire, which they may have chanced to don that morning.

He would scarcely have guessed : and his speculations were in any case cut short by Prince, who put his head out again and shouted, "You're to go in now, Marsh."

Lycidas pulled himself together and went in.

He had never seen the Sixth Form room before, and found it now in some confusion. The squat little desks, peculiar to this room, had all been drawn back against the one side which lacked panelling, and on them were perched perhaps a dozen of the largest boys, the Sixth Form or Præpostors. On a daïs, at the Head Master's desk, there sat the Head of the School, a pencil in his hand and paper on the desk before him.

"Stand there," he said, when Lycidas had gone some paces. "Marsh, were you one of the boys who were stopped by Vincent the other night?"

School-boy ethics is the subtlest of philosophies. For one boy to lie to another is the worst of



*Photo: W. D. Hayden*

“THE SQUAT LITTLE DESKS PEGULAR TO THIS ROOM”

*To face p. 140*



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sins, and met with universal scorn ; but masters are different—duels with them fall beneath the head of war, where all is fair and possible. That, at least, is as near as I can gain to the unwritten code. And 'postors, in official moments, rank with masters.

Russell the resourceful had invented a long tale of how they had been sorry for poor Grouse, and had planned to give him exercise. All the three were pledged to say that they had meant no harm to the dog ; and Lycidas had never looked upon it as a lie. It was a defence, and he was his own barrister : that was his reasoning, had he cared to formulate it.

But the first question seemed to give him no chance.

“ Yes, sir,” was all he could think of, and he might have clipped the “ sir.”

“ Well, why did you run away, when he told you to stop ? ”

“ I don't know.” He tried to keep his voice from shaking.

“ You knew he was a præpostor ? ”

“ Y-yes.” Why had not Russell framed a lie to this ?

The Head of the School glanced at his colleagues, saw that they were satisfied. “ Will you take what we give you, or will you appeal to the Head Master ? ”

"I'll take—what you give me," said Lycidas from his dry throat.

"Go outside, until we send for you."

Lycidas went out, to find Russell waiting, but before he had reached him, the door opened and Prince said "Marsh, again!" They had not needed long, to fix the punishment.

Præpostorial justice is kinder than the justice of the State in that it spares its prisoners the long-drawn agony of a paternal lecture before announcing the penalty imposed.

"Bend over that desk, Marsh," said the Head of the School, simply.

Prince arranged him to his satisfaction, with his arms well down, his legs well below his body.

Lycidas was straining his ears. Kelly had told him, amidst a host of other realistic details, that the head boy chose the executioner, and that one could hear by listening. And he did.

"Parr," came the word. Lycidas felt joy run through him: he knew that Parr was just as weak as Vincent! Nor had the Head of the School been ignorant: but pity took him for this diminutive person and his ill-hid fear.

There was the slightest pause while he chose a sound cane, and handed it to Parr.

*Parr* made a sad bungle of his first attempt at

swiping. Of his four cuts, not a single one got really home.

But it was quite enough for Lycidas. He felt the tears rise up, and fought them down. It was a relief and a surprise, when he heard "That will do." He had been told by every one that he was sure of six. He walked more or less firmly to the door, proudly conscious that he was not crying.

As he passed Russell, he cried "four," in ghoul-  
ish joy, and then he went downstairs. A large crowd had gathered and was disappointed to see Marsh only rather pale. Some who had thought him a milksop now began to readjust their views. A sixth form swiping is no jest even to the harder skin of sixteen years, and Lycidas, in face of admirers, did not dwell upon the fact that he had had Parr as executioner. Indeed, he never chanced to mention it. To himself, he thought what a silly idiot the head boy had been to choose him. It was not for three years that the doubt occurred—Had it after all been mercy?

Incidentally, this day meant much to Lycidas. It was the first time that he had properly realized that tears were something which lay under his control, that by his will he could restrain them. And his pride, as he passed with dry eyes between the rows of onlookers, thoroughly repaid the strain.

From this day on, Lycidas Marsh was never seen to cry in public. Never again could Russell counsel him to put his tears into a bottle!

The incident had one other result, which was to make much difference in the years to come.

As they stood comparing notes, Russell said to him, "Oh, it's all jolly well for you, Marsh. Evans and I both got it extra hard—the swine said we were cheeky, and I got two more for padding. Smith and Parker gave me three each."

Lycidas smiled. Smith and Parker had played against Uppingham at Fives.

"I think I scored," he said, "for all your cleverness!"

Russell turned on him in sudden anger. "Shut up, you little ass. What's it got to do with you?" and strode away.

Marsh had ceased to amuse him!

Henceforth, he scarcely spoke to Lycidas. The strange friendship was broken, but it was yet to bear its fruits.

Evans showed a better humour, when Lycidas exulted over him.

"Hullo, Evans! I thought *you* were all right, they wouldn't dare hit *you*! Isn't your pater on a something league?"

“Yes, but you wait! I’ve written to him, and you’ll see!”

“Why, what happened? I thought you appealed to the Head?”

“So I did—I suppose he was sick at being called from breakfast! He said so far as he saw, I most *thoroughly* deserved the punishment I was about to receive, or some rot like that, and he wouldn’t hear about my pater. So I told the Sixth he’d run them in, if they touched me, and he said he’d swipe me first and then my pater could run him in—and they did, too, jolly hard. Oh, it’s all very well for you to laugh, Marsh, but I call it beastly rot. You wait though!”

It may be well, as an interesting sidelight on the Public School system of self-government, to trace this “Evans affair” to its end.

Mr. Evans duly wrote to the Head of the School, stating that he understood he was addressing the boy who had sanctioned the assault upon his son. Probably he had erred through ignorance of the law, and he (Mr. Evans) was therefore willing to accept an apology and an assurance that the incident would not occur again. The letter was in the third person, with an incredible number of viz.’s, i.e.’s, and words in brackets. On paper and on envelope blazed the crest of his Humanitarian League.

The Head of the School wrote back as follows: that he had received Mr. Evans' letter, but that he did not feel able to do anything in the matter. Least of all did he see his way to apologize. If Mr. Evans believed an assault had been committed, punishable by law, there was always the remedy of the law; but he felt justified in saying that Shrewsbury would fight the case as one vital to her existence. (This phrase he got from a daily paper.) The rule of boys by boys was the main principle of Public School existence, and if the right to punish were abolished, that principle would vanish. The punishments were limited to six strokes with a cane and the copying of one book of Milton, while appeal to the Head Master was always allowed. In this case, such appeal had been made and failed. For the rest, he could see no means of guaranteeing that the incident should not occur again. If Mr. Evans' son repeated his offence in any form, the incident would occur in a severer tone. There were, so far as he saw, only two ways in which Mr. Evans could guard against its recurrence. In the first place, he could ensure that his son did not break School rules. In the second, if Mr. Evans felt himself unable to approve the constitution of Shrewsbury School as suited to his son, he was able, at any moment, to remove him.

*This* rather imposing and flawlessly logical

epistle was composed, with much ribaldry, by five members of the Sixth, and posted.

It remains only to add that J. Evans stayed his time out at the Schools, and swiped many a boy, as monitor in Alton's House.



## CHAPTER X

### THE POET AT THE BUMPING RACES

THE loss of Russell's friendship did not worry Lycidas extremely. He had never got to know him as he first hoped he might; indeed, he had no great friendships like those in the story books. Still, he now had a number of acquaintances, with whom he watched matches, played small games, went to the baths, and made Sunday excursions in or out of bounds. They were not, of course, so dazzling as the brilliant Russell, but also they were less bewildering: Lycidas knew what they meant. They, for their part, tolerated him: he wasn't a bad sort, except that he was a rotter at games.

Lycidas learnt so much through a ventilator. These ventilators, fixed over the study doors and popularly known as "clappers," are the chief medium by which Salopians learn the wholesome truth about themselves. Lycidas was just about to enter the study of one whom he believed to be a friend, when his own name floated to him

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through the open ventilator. Unconsciously, he stood in the act of turning the handle.

"Oh, he's a decent enough fellow," came in his friend's voice.

"I don't know, he's not much good at anything."

"No. He's not such a rotter as he was, though."

Lycidas silently let go the handle, and crept back to his study, not venturing to close the door; and there he sat, thinking, feeling suddenly alone. Six months ago, he would have cried. Now he set himself, very wretched, to realize the whole meaning of what he had heard. There was nothing against him now, except that he could not play footer. The House was beginning to forget his tears, his idiotic mistakes: he was a decent enough fellow, less of a rotter; but—he was no good at games.

Lycidas saw that everything came back to that. To be popular, to have influence, one must be good at games. A few who were good at games were still unpopular; but none were popular who were not good at games.

"Good at games——" The phrase kept ringing in his ears. Why was he no good at games? He tried to be, and he was keen to be; but he had started late. Why had his

people not made him play? Why not sent him to a school before?

Perhaps, now, he never would be an athlete. Probably, it would be against him all his life! Or were there professions where it was not necessary to be good at games? Not likely—or why was everyone so keen on them?

Lycidas increased his efforts to become a player, and his anxiety was counted as righteousness to him: he escaped the worst reputation, Kelly's reputation, that of "sapping." He meant well: he was clearly keener on his games than on his work; but it just happened that he was no good at them.

The bitterest thought to Lycidas was that, with the next term, he must start a new game, begin the hard climb all over again.

When the next term, the summer term, the best of all the terms, came, he duly started cricket. He had no delusions now upon such points: he did not hope to be a brilliant success at first. He more or less expected to do exactly what he did in his first junior House game, to go in and come out again, with hardly an interval between the walks. Moreover, he dropped the easiest of catches, so that a little gap went round the players, then a laugh, and each turned to his neighbour with a shrug as if to say, "Don Q. again!" Lycidas had

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practised catching in the holidays, and felt it keenly.

For some games after this, he stood in a very dread, fearing at each stroke that the batsman might spoon the ball towards him, almost praying that he might not, or that, if he must, the catch might be a hard one: and in his anxiety he dropped two more.

But at last the time came, when the ball whirled towards him, turning treacherously, not the catch at all for any novice, and Lycidas outstretched his hands, cup-like, to take it. His heart was full of terror, and he knew the sighs, the cries of "Oh!" and "Butter," as the ball would drop. But this time, it was not to drop. It stuck, tingling, in his hands, and Lycidas could hear, "*Well caught!*" and laughing, but genuine, applause.

At first it seemed that it must be an accident; but when he realized how easy it had been, he came to the conclusion that he could never miss a catch again.

This last belief erred on the side of optimism, but Lycidas had gained the cricketer's chief asset, confidence. Nor was there long to wait before the day when his stumps did not spread-eagle, until he was credited with three single runs. They had not been great hits, these three; and the awful joy of sneaking the runs

seemed to Lycidas the most thrillingly adventurous thing of his whole life. He longed to experience it again.

Far from dreading, he began to look forward to the "halves" and short lesson days, which made for cricket. Yet even so, his score never rose to double figures, and he was still painfully aware that he was nobody, because he was "no good at games." Sometimes he would enviously watch Russell, a promising bat, being coached at nets by members of the House Eleven.

It was in such a despondent mood that Lycidas found himself one day, when the captain of the House Boat entered. Lycidas, of course, did not know such a "tweak," and had vague suspicions of a "swiping" in reserve. But Skelton seemed genial enough.

"I say, you've passed your test all right, Marsh, haven't you?" he asked.

Lycidas answered yes, with pride; he had lost no time in swimming the required length in the baths. He would show the men that he could do something!

"Well, what's your weight, about?"

Lycidas gave it as nearly as he knew, but was distinctly puzzled by the query. What could it all mean?

"Have you ever steered a boat?"

"Only down at Ramsgate, where I learnt to

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swim. We used to go there in the summer." Guileless, he had still not realized entirely that home details are quite out of place at school ; but he had never, be it added in his favour, told any one that L., in " L. Marsh," really stood for Lycidas !

" Well, I want you to come down to the river, after four, and have a try. Be at the boat-house at four-fifteen, see ?"

Lycidas saw. He had caught a glimpse of the delicious truth at the mention of steering. He was to be tried as cox ! Moreover, though he scarcely dared to hope it, he had a notion that he was to be tried as cox of the *first* House Boat. Everybody knew that the boy who had coxed Alton's for two years, had grown disgracefully heavy in the last few months, and that none of the substitutes tried, including the cox of the second boat, had proved efficient.

Lycidas could scarcely exist through the slow length of third lesson. Thank goodness, it was short lesson day : one more hour would have killed him !

This was the best thing that could possibly have happened. If he were chosen cox he would be doing something for Alton's ! He would also be more popular in consequence ; but first of all, this afternoon, was the thought that he would be doing something to help Alton's.



Ever since Macrae's words to him, "We all do something for the House, in D," he had burned to help. And now there seemed a chance.

All through the hour's work he could think of nothing else. The form master did not know this, but he did know that Marsh was not thinking of his work, and he put him down as inattentive, for a punishment. Lycidas did not care: it might lose him first day, but what did that matter—to-day?

Oh, if only he could be chosen to cox the House Boat!

And he was.

His weight proved to be less than that of his rivals, and those who remembered his past exploits (who did not?) saw little cause to doubt his pluck. He was certainly a little cracked, they reasoned, but he seemed to keep his head all right in steering; besides—bitter pill, had Lycidas but known it!—he was no good to the House on land.

Lycidas was chosen cox.

It seemed too good to be true: he was going to help Alton's! The House, at this period of his career, meant far more than the School to him: and this is so, I fancy, with most boys of his age. When he was at home, he throbbed with pride of Shrewsbury, and as Mrs. Marsh's *cousin* had predicted, felt scorn unlimited for

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all things not Salopian. But when he was at Shrewsbury, things were different. You went to watch the School footer matches, for instance, and they were quite decent, but you put on a thick coat and took care to fill its pockets with grub. Then you stood and shivered, even on a warm day, along one side of the field, and every now and then a long-drawn "Play-up, Schoo-oo-ools" went calmly through the row, like some wave breaking down a rocky coast. Of course, when the match was against Malvern or Repton, it was different: those were beastly rival schools. You got quite keen then. But the real thing was the House matches! You didn't want a coat or grub then! You kept pushing forward, to the linesman's anger, so as to miss nothing, shouting and jumping, drowning the cries of the other House, and even running up and down the line, behind. Cheering and excitement kept you warm. And when your House was in the final——

Yes, the House was certainly the thing!

Lycidas was overwhelmed with congratulations and terribly painful backsmackings, and the more so, as the rumour gained that he was making a good cox. His time grew more and more to be spent by, or on, the Severn, and he became an adept at dashing, yet not falling, down the zig-zag stony path, which drops steep from the school



buildings to the river bank. Sometimes he still got a stray game of cricket, or would imitate his fellows by watching, in the Salopian manner, a school match. The method is peculiar, since it consists in strewing a rug on the grass slope, buying cherries, getting a book from the House library; and so equipped, lying flat upon your front with your back turned to the School cricket. When the bigger boys applaud, it is customary to turn over, gaze pensively at the outcoming batsman and ask, with no hope of an answer, "How did he get out?" This method of watching School matches would seem to lend weight to the theory that, for the younger boys, the House is mightier than the School.

Lycidas enjoyed these peaceful afternoons immensely, but his heart was with the river, now. He was still young enough to enjoy being on the water as a treat in itself, for he was not of those who are world-sick at fourteen; but what really pleased him was the excitement of it all, the splash of the water, the rapid motion, the hoarse cries of the "coach," the long swing of the rowers. Lycidas, as fits a poet's son, had—quite unconsciously—a sense of rhythm.

As the Bumping Races drew near, his blood warmed still more to the task. The four would sometimes do a practice start or a sprint, and at such moments Lycidas grew almost corybantic in





*Photo: J. Gillman, Oxford*

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his fervour. He would throw himself about and yell.

Skelton, stroke and captain, began to get nervous. Much hinged upon the race this year. Alton's had been Head of the River for three summers in succession, until the races before these, when Doctor's had bumped them and gone Head. This year, then, Alton's started second and could either retrieve their fame or sink hopelessly among the ruck.

So much rested with the cox! Would young Marsh keep his head? Everybody knew what an excitable young fool he was! Hollins and others made a point of calming Lycidas by frequently telling him what horrible tortures he was to expect, should he make a mistake.

Lycidas, as the first day loomed near, increased in nervousness.

The Bumpers, to give them their familiar name, are split in such a way that a day of rest is allowed in the middle of the four days' racing.

Alton's made no bump on the Tuesday, Wednesday or Friday. Doctor's boat was not so fast, but, besides the lead which they had at the start, they were favoured by enjoying the unruffled water. There were anxious moments, each night, for their supporters: but Alton's never really overlapped. Lycidas steered well, but the best

cox cannot make a bump, unless his boat can overlap the other!

Alton's boat was cheered nightly on the river bank and in the changing-room, where Lycidas received congratulations. "We shall do it on Saturday" was on everybody's lips, and often added to it was, "We must." But Doctor's, too, were certain to be on their mettle, this last night.

Lycidas was now favoured with a bewildering amount of advice from critics mostly little qualified to speak. Skelton told him not to listen to these amateur experts. One of the masters was kindly coaching Alton's, and his great voice bellowed counsel to the rowers through a megaphone. "Wait till he shouts, 'Shoot!' If you make a shot at them, before we've overlapped enough, you'll miss the bump and lose us all our way. Don't mind what the other fellows say, and don't get flurried. There can't possibly be a mistake. You've coxed splendidly, so far."

But Lycidas was twice as anxious as he had been upon the other nights. If he got a chance and missed to-night, he certainly would never get another!

The nervous strain became too great. He hurried into his flannels—oh, the pride of putting on his blazer!—and ran down early to the boat-house. Alton's, as starting second in the race, would take up its position last but one, and half-

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an-hour must elapse before Lycidas could get into his seat. But the process of "going down" is lengthy, and had begun already. Lycidas watched it curiously: this was the first night that he had been there so early.

There were close upon two dozen boats competing, and as fours are chosen by the crews in accordance with their place upon the river, those who started first were notable rather for simplicity and solidity than for grace of design. These bottom boats are, indeed, irreverently nicknamed "Men o' War."

On the ground above, a cricket match against the Old Salopians was being played, and these humbler heroes of the heavy boats had few partisans to cheer them. But every moment brought more flanneled boys upon the other bank, who cried with lusty voices, "Row up, —'s," as each boat put off from the landing-stage. By the time that Alton's were due, there was a thick crowd upon the water's edge, constantly fed by streams of running figures, dashing wildly across the toll-bridge, and by more stately "tweaks," privileged to use the ferry.

The race for Headship is, of course, the race of the evening, and popular favour, as proved by applause, was almost evenly balanced between Doctor's and pursuing Alton's. There is always boyish prejudice against those who hold a cup;



but Alton's, on the other hand, had won it far too often, of late years. The two boats gained practically equal cheers, as Alton's first, then Doctor's, they pushed off and paddled, with a spurt or two, down to the starting-place beside the Brewery.

These are the most agonizing minutes, the time of delay while the boats get in their berths. There is much to do upon the bank, where somebody is busy struggling with the rope which cox must hold until the starting-gun: but for the rowers this is a time of inaction, varied only by a last word of advice from the coach or a joke from some friend upon the bank.

Lycidas feels no less nervous than the rowers. His whole body seems to be pressing on the part below his chest. He can compare these minutes only with those spent outside the sixth form room. It will be all right, when they start!

"Cox up, Don Q.!" cries some one, and everybody laughs, as people laugh at trifles in a moment of high tension.

But at last he holds the rope-end in his hand, the boat drifts gently from the point at which it has to start, everything is ready. A master hurries past inquiring, "Are you ready?" Doctor's too, it seems, are ready.

Every one, indeed, longs for the start. All the Old Boys on the bank, who have ever rowed in

## THE POET AT THE BUMPING RACES 161

Bumpers, feel just as bad as those in the boats.  
The first gun comes to every one as a relief.

“Touch her, bow and two,” the coach cries, to counteract the Severn’s tide : and then a parting word of counsel.

Sweaters have been cast aside.

The minute gun !

There is a general stir : some few weaklings, whose ardour outruns their wind, walk on to get a good start, as the moments pass.

“Three-quarters !” shouts out the starter, standing by the gun-man’s side, and “Three-quarters !” roars along the course.

“Half !”

“Half !” goes the echoing shout.

“Touch her gently, bow and two,” the coach exclaims. Otherwise, a deathly silence.

“Quarter !”

“Quarter !”

All, by instinct, brace themselves upon the bank. It is not etiquette to run until the gun sounds. In the boat they sit like statues, arms bent forward for the stroke. Lycidas can hear his heart go.

“Ten ! Nine ! Eight ! . . . .” the starter cries, and these too are passed raucously along the bend, losing their time a little in the journey. Alton’s are just crying “One !” when the gun cracks forth. But the gun is all that matters.



No one waits for the word "Gun!" At the first sound the boat shoots forward, Lycidas lets drop the rope, and at the same moment all the crowd of boys and Old Boys dashes on with a wild shout and mad clang of bells or whirr of rattles.

"Row up, Alton's!" and from a few yards up the counter cry booms, "Row up, Doctor's!"

"They've got a splendid start," cries some one who knows nothing of it. "We're gaining, gaining!" shrieks another, and at the word, eyes on the boat, he stumbles to the flinty road and brings two more to his fall. Many from the other Houses, sportsmen before patriots, have left their own boats to their fate and run on to join this rushing throng of shouting, red-faced, Youth with knees that work like piston rods and throats that roar like thunder. A master's wife, keen type of sporting woman, forges along on her bicycle, ringing madly, falling foul of small boys, a modern Juggernaut. And Alton's coach, in College blazer, runs like any boy, and through his trumpet mouth orates, "Oh, keep it long! You're getting them! You're getting them! Well rowed!" till all the crowd takes up the parrot-cry, "Well rowed!"

Lycidas knows nothing of all this, except the noise. He is quite happy, now that they have started. The cheers inspire him. He revels in his skill, revels in the narrow strip he leaves





Photo : F. R. Armstrong

"GAINING ! GAINING !"

## THE POET AT THE BUMPING RACES 163

between the oar-blades and the boat which marks the treacherous drain-pipe. He cranes round the great form of Skelton. They are gaining. Alton's gaining! He shouts it out to ears that are beyond all hearing. Skelton and his fellows are automata. Plug—plug—plug! It is their utmost. No cry can increase their pace.

Lycidas has a straight course now, for a while. They shoot beneath the Kingsland toll-bridge, crowded with the masters' wives and friends. He sees the shadow, hears the small, shrill cry above the deeper roar, but does not trust himself to look. Instead, he peers once more at Doctor's rudder. It is nearer now, much nearer.

Gaining! Gaining!

That word rings in his ears, he shouts it wildly, all unknowing, as they go past the boat-house, and enter the reach which leads to Pengwerne Corner—Pengwerne Corner where the bumps are made!

“You've got 'em! Got 'em!”

He can hear what they are shrieking, now. He's got them! He leans once more towards the right, and looks. Their bows are overlapping Doctor's rudder! The bump is his!

“Row! Row!” he cries. “We've got 'em, now! We've got 'em.” His hoarse voice breaks upon a treble note, but nobody can hear it. Bells are clanging, rattles whirring, sirens shrill-

ing; and over all the great yell, "Now! Now!"—every sign that Doctor's day is short. It comes to Lycidas, a muffled roar, as of a distant fair-ground: and above it suddenly there sound the coach's accents, clear and loud—

"Shoot, now! Shoot! *Shoot!*"

Lycidas has heard, but does not shoot. He is mad, mad with excitement, mad with lust of victory, intoxicated by the noise. He rocks to and fro, and shrieks in a hoarse voice, "Row! Row!"

"Shoot, you young fool, shoot! Good Lord, man, *shoot!*"

The coach is no more Lycidas' master. He is back at Cambridge. He is coaching, and a little idiot of a cox has got a bump and will not take it.

"Now! *Now!*" howls every one.

Hollins plods on, hurling awful threats at the unconscious cox. "My lord, I'll flay you dead to-night, young Marsh. Great snakes, he's overlapping yards! Oh now! Shoot! Now!" His hands are clenching and unclenching. A guileless day boy, coming in his path, is hurtled to the stony ground.

The boats are past the corner now, the corner where they should have bumped. Lycidas knows that they are overlapping, knows that he can make a bump, hears the furious bellow, "*Shoot!*"



## THE POET AT THE BUMPING RACES 165

Shoot he cannot : that would end it all !

The victory is in his grasp ; these instants wipe out all his former hours of life. He does not think of others : he scarcely thinks of himself. He loves the splashing water, loves the tension of the moment, loves the deafening uproar, loves Skelton's strong arms flashing to and fro like some great engine, loves to feel that all depends on him, on *him* ! He hurls himself to and fro, as though to speed the boat more quickly, and from dry lips and drier throat he shrieks out, "Faster ! Faster !"

"He must be mad !" "The little ass !" "Good Lord !" "Wait till I——" Such exclamations, finished and unfinished, pour in gasps from the exhausted throats of those who run.

"Oh, *do* shoot ! *Shoot* !" plaintively shrieks the coach. But his real agony is over, for with his greater knowledge he sees Doctor's to be done : sees that Alton's hold them in their hand : only, this delay annoys him.

And Lycidas shoots suddenly. He has not planned it so ; he feels that when this stops, he ceases life : he is beyond all planning. But as the second boat draws up along the first, the rubber ball which shields its bow hits against the oar of Doctor's stroke ; and cox, long knowing himself bumped, fearing greatly to be rammed, holds up his hand.

At the sign of defeat both coxes cry, "Easy all," the roar of execration shades on the moment to a twofold roar of exultation, bugles blow, hands wave; and as the lower boats go by, close in, the victor and the vanquished float out, a shapeless mass, towards the other bank. Skelton and bow fall limply forward on their oars which plough the water.

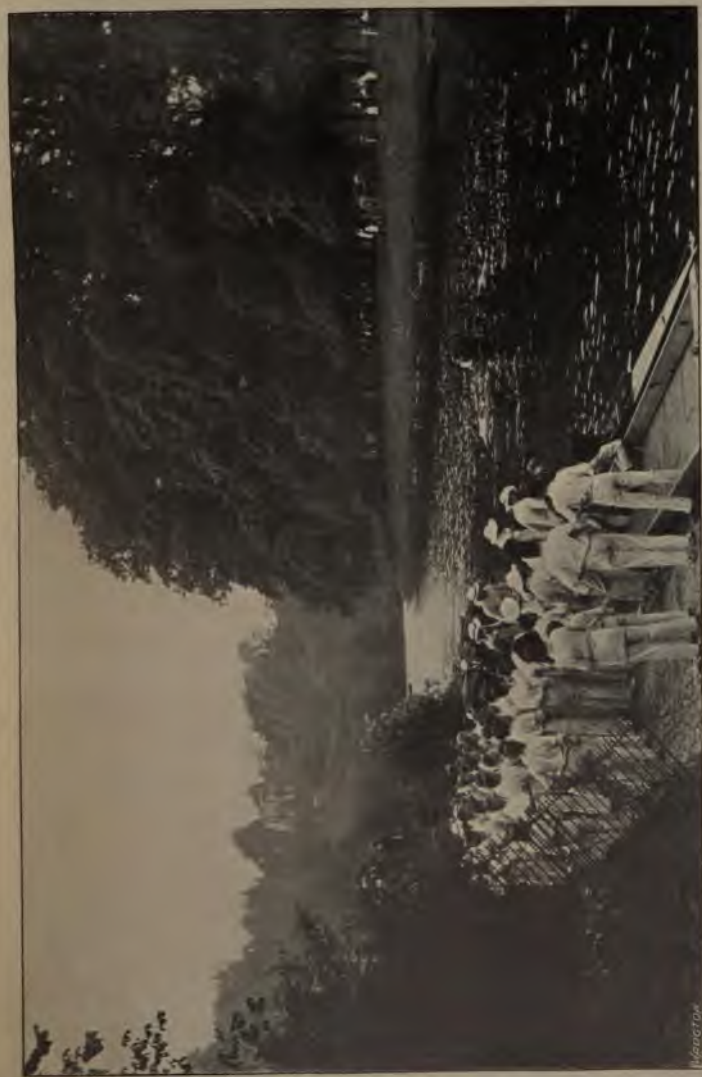
For Lycidas the spell is broken. He comes to himself, and tears are streaming fast down either cheek. Not for nothing was he born a poet's son!

So the race was over! Everything was over!

He gazed dreamily towards the howling mass. "Well bumped, Don Q.!" cried somebody. And even Hollins laughed—Hollins who had vowed such ghastly punishments! He felt different now.

But Lycidas was nervous. Skelton gradually righted himself, and very pale, his great chest heaving, smiled whimsically at him and said nothing. As he steered them to the boat-house, amid thundering cheers and waving from the bridge of countless handkerchiefs, Lycidas asked himself guiltily again and again, had he made an idiot of himself once more? Oh, why on earth—whatever made him do these things?

But at the landing-stage, where willing arms



Wénoctow

Photo: F. R. Armstrong



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## THE POET AT THE BUMPING RACES 167

took up the boat, he heard only cheers, and no abuse among them, whilst in the changing-room, whither all had hurried, he came in for his share of applause and of buffeting which, from past experience rather than from present feelings, he knew to be kindly meant.

Hollins came across to him and said impressively, "Well, my noble sportsman, if you'd stuck on forty yards more and let them reach the finish, I'd have swiped you till you looked like butcher's meat," and then he joined in the unceasing chorus, "*Well* rowed, Alton's."

Presently Mr. Alton, drawn by the noise on his return from the river, came and held up his hand for silence. "Well done," he said, shaking Skelton's hand, "I'm delighted. We mustn't cheer any more now, or the other Houses will call us *lifty*." Again he put a satirical emphasis on the slang phrase and added, "We'll do our cheering at the supper to-night."

There was certainly no lack of cheering at the Bump Supper in Alton's that night. This supper, given by the House Master, is in a sense the pivot of the year's athletics. When the eating has been hurried through—a maximum of eating in a minimum of time—the House Master, the head of the House, the Coach, and possibly an Old Boy, make short speeches extolling the prowess of the House through all the year. In

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But at the landing-stage, where willing men

## THE POET AT THE BUMPING RACES 169

trooped into D, and insisted on being introduced to "the make-sure cox," his admiration for them grew tenfold. He began to attach a real value to everything that they said, and it was from these Old Boys that Lycidas had the first glimpse of what Shrewsbury might mean to him some day. Those masters, too, whom they declared to be "good sorts," he regarded henceforth as deserving of far less scorn than he had hitherto supposed.

Proudest moment of all, as the last two made a round of farewell visits before leaving, they burst into his study, and ignoring his senior Kelly (who was still in number ten), shook hands with him, and said they hoped to meet again.

"You lucky little beast," one of them said, "being able to stay here!"

Lycidas looked doubtful. This was the first silly thing that he had heard them say.

And as the two Old Salopians went down the passage, sadly, to their cab, feeling that they were leaving a part of their life behind them, one of them, who was still at Oxford, sighed, "*O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint.*"

The other did not understand. He was a Cambridge man, and his Tripos was the Natural Sciences.

But in the study Lycidas turned to Kelly and said, "Lucky beasts, *them*—going home!"

He looked up wistfully at his calendar, where ten long days still called for blackening. . . .

It was during these holidays that he first observed the quaintness of his father's tie.

**PART THE SECOND**  
**YEARS THAT PASS AS ONE**



## CHAPTER XI

### SEE-SAW—DOWN!

THE excellent Taine, in his truly Gallic comments upon Dickens, puts into the public's mouth these sentiments: "You will grasp a personage in a single attitude, you will see of him only that, and you will impose it upon him from beginning to end. . . . Each of your characters will be a vice, a virtue, a ridicule personified; and the passion, which you lend it, will be so frequent, so invariable, so absorbing, that it will no longer be like a living man, but an abstraction in man's clothes. . . . You do not follow the development: you always keep your character in the same attitude; he is a miser, or a hypocrite, or a good man, to the end, and always after the same fashion: thus he has no history."

The words refer only to the firm-moulded gallery of caricatures which came from the workshop of the great London satirist, his Pecksniff, his Fagin, or his Mrs. Gamp; but



they might well refer to the puppets of the average school story.

In such a book, the hero and his fellows commonly arrive set in a fixed mould of character. They are bullies, they are heroes; they are snobs, or they are dandies: and in every possible circumstance the bully will bully, the hero be heroic, and the rest behave in accordance with the label fixed to them. It is inconceivable that the bully should have human feelings or fits of geniality: he is only fifteen, but his character is fixed for life! So with the snob. Although snobbery is a vice of late and gradual growth, the snob of these stories will refer everything to birth; and this, in a community where all social bars are broken and each boy, inwardly proud of his parents, is outwardly ashamed of mentioning their very name.

The hero alone is allowed, sometimes, a change: but it must always be a change unvarying in its direction over any stated interval of time. He must always be rising, or always be sinking, in morality and influence. Like the bully and the snob, he is a stereotyped individuality at thirteen years: and given no age, the reader would not be surprised to learn, late in the book, that such words, such impulses, such actions, come from a young man who is finishing his 'teens. To the creator of this hero might almost be addressed

the Frenchman's pregnant words to Dickens: "You can only change the circumstances in which he is met with, you do not change him: he remains motionless, and at every shock that touches him, emits the same sound."

Nothing could be less true to the facts of life.

Like corks bobbing aimlessly in the eddy of a waterfall, the boys now rise, now sink, now seem about to break away into the safer stream, now dart back to the peril of the cataract: and that they are seemingly unconscious of their changes, makes them more bewildering to the spectator.

Pity Mr. Alton, doomed to watch, and to answer for, the dazzling fluctuations of more than forty boys! Rejoice that, though he may suspect, he cannot notice half the dangers which beset them!

Few boys, in these next years, caused him more anxiety than Lycidas. He could see that this boy Marsh was settling down to the strange ways of school, he heard no more of marvellous mistakes, revealed to him by confidential boys as humour, received by him with laughter's dimmest imitation. That was for the good: he could expect no service from a recognized buffoon: but the Bumping Race episode suggested other thoughts. He had heard the story from a dozen lips: he could not doubt its truth. What was

one to do with a boy of such a temperament? What folly, of life-long influence, might he not adventure next? And lectures seemed of no avail: the boy stared sadly, like the others, at the fire! Mr. Alton could not help being fond of Marsh; he saw the good qualities underneath this surface sense of drama. He hoped to have him as a monitor, some day: there was good stuff in him, down below. Mr. Alton usually marked his monitors early, and bent them slowly to his purpose.

Lycidas, for his part, did not greatly enjoy his second year.

Those last days of his first had set him on an eminence, and now everything seemed flat, unprofitable, by its side. He had the uncomfortable sense of being in eclipse.

The coach, on the day after the supper, had remarked that Marsh's coxing was magnificent, but it was not sport: while Skelton had openly declared that he would not row a race again, with Marsh as cox, for fifty pounds: it was a little bit too much!

Lycidas saw—the whole House saw—that someone else would cox the boat on the next occasion: nor was his football good enough as yet to regain him the prestige thus lost. Marsh was no longer one of those who were "doing things" for Alton's.

Socially, too, he found himself losing favour. Russell never spoke to him in these days, and the House in general, once Marsh ceased to make a fool of himself, began to find him unamusing. He was gradually driven back to talk with Kelly and with J. Evans, who remained his friends. But these were unathletic men, and nobody thought much of them. He longed for his old popularity.

He saw that people no more found him funny, and for two weeks he tried to make a fool of himself on every possible occasion. It was, indeed, lucky for him that this phase died through non-success; for no habit is so tiring, and so hard to drop, as idiocy.

During this second year, in which he passed from fourteen to fifteen, Lycidas found himself the prey of countless short ambitions and passing fancies, which he took with intense seriousness during the period of their existence. This was, in a large degree, due to his loneliness and sense of failure.

His mother, in the first place, full of nervous fears, had wished him to be confirmed early in life, and so Lycidas went through the ceremony before he well knew the meaning of the temptations, against which he was to gather strength. The confidential chats with Mr. Alton, the impressive words of the Head Master in the dim-~~lit~~

chapel, made their mark. Lycidas, his nerves overstrung, decided that his life so far had been a whirl of sin, his life henceforth must be an effort to redeem it, to set others on the higher path. He was full of noble fancies, great schemes for regenerating Man.

These lasted, without fruit of practice, for ten days, at the end of which a master gave him two detentions for throwing a straw hat about upon the Common, and, being in orders, added that such an action so soon after confirmation partook almost of irreverence.

Lycidas swung round. Clearly he had failed ; he was not meant for such high purposes. He came to see a life of crime and sin unfolding itself luridly before him. He wondered how he should conceal his inborn wickedness from those who loved him. He saw himself a byword of daring immorality.

This phase, too, for lack of opportunity, soon withered, and was finally uprooted on reception of two more detentions, which gave him to think seriously on his chances of first day.

Such, and other such, phantasies ran through his mind, in that age where youth first gropes for its powers and passions, an age which came earlier to Lycidas than to his fellows, and depressing him, failed to interest the others. Lycidas saw his friends drifting from him and was discouraged.

What hurt him most of all was to watch the success of Russell.

Russell, his body swelling out of all proportion to his age and mind, playing sometimes for the House in football, gained rapidly in popularity and skill at games. Lycidas was not the only one, among those of his own standing, to whom he did not speak; his friends were of a higher order. If they were not exactly "the tweaks" of the House, they were at least tweaks of a humbler kind: and Russell delighted in meeting Lycidas whilst with them. At such times he would always raise his voice, show a new vivacity, and when he dared, link arms with them: all of which had the required effect on Lycidas. He grew still more envious of Russell.

Their sixth term, when they had been at Alton's close upon two years, brought these two into strange relation. Lycidas, since Macrae had changed dormitory as Head of the House, had been in E, another small room, with Hobbs as monitor. Hobbs, as Lycidas knew, was a good-humoured creature, and though he was not to be admired with the passionate hero-worship accorded to Macrae, things were well enough in E. It was a very peaceful time.

It was with a feeling of threatened disaster, then, that Lycidas, when he scanned the dormitory list this term, found that Russell had



been put in E. Mr. Alton had, indeed, hesitated, fearing to revive the undesired friendship between these two; but the arrangement of dormitories is no easy matter, and it seemed more probable that Hobbs and Marsh would keep Russell quiet than that he would make them rowdy. Marsh, he saw, had settled down; his poses were exhausted; he might even be the better for a little rousing.

E was certainly a quiet dormitory. It was one of the smallest rooms, in which the monitor is usually given a single friend of his own standing, and, for the rest, small boys. Hobbs had expressed himself as contented with Russell on the score of company; Lycidas was given the third corner bed, and in the other three were boys of less than one year's standing.

It is possibly a libel to say that a man whose good-humour comes from fat usually combines weak-mindedness; but it was so with Hobbs. Everything was too much "sap," not good enough, and Russell found himself practically his own master. He also found himself a little bored. Hobbs often, after a few minutes of the dark, would give a porcine grunt, and with an ominous creak of the bed, roll over to a symphony of slow-drawn snores; and Russell did not care to talk with Lycidas.

*It was close upon half term that Hobbs had*

chosen this procedure one night, and Russell had amused himself, as the sole variant of silence, with making small boys sing. "The Lost Chord," "Rule, Britannia," and "Tom Bowling" had failed to exhilarate him.

"I say, Marsh, are you still awake?"

Though they had often joined in the same conversation, while Hobbs was talking, this was the first remark addressed direct to Lycidas by Russell. Lycidas noticed that it was the same question that Macrae had asked him as a new kid two years back in D.

"Yes," he answered, a surprised note in his voice.

"Usedn't *you* to sing?"

"Yes. *You* didn't, did you?" He laughed silently, as one who scores.

"Well, let's hear 'Killaloe' now!" said Russell calmly.

Lycidas could not believe his ears: Russell wanted *him* to sing.

"No. Get the new kids to sing again," he answered, in a lofty manner.

"I'm fed up with them: they moan. Buck up! 'Killaloe.'"

"No, I'm not going to sing."

"Buck up, or I'll souse your bed."

Lycidas heard him creep forward on his bed, until he reached the wash-stand. There was the



drip of water, and presently a wet sponge squelched upon his counterpane. He picked it up, and hurled it straight at Russell's bed. He heard it hit the wall and drop.

"*All* right, Marsh!" said Russell: but threw no more sponges.

"Are you going to sing, or not?" he cried instead. "If not, I'll pull you out of bed and duck you. So just strike up!"

Lycidas could hear him once more climbing from his bed. He did not weigh the consequences of surrender: he only knew that it would be eternal disgrace to be publicly bullied by any one of his own standing, only knew that Russell would find no difficulty whatever in the task. Had he not often looked at Russell's arms and chest, swelling firmly under the clear skin, fruits of early training, and then glanced down in shame at his own girl-like arms and hollow chest?

"I'll just sing the first verse, if it amuses you," he said, with what air he could of an equal indulging an equal in a harmless whim.

"Go on, then," the other answered and climbed back to bed, as the first flat notes began.

Like most compromises, it was fatal. Very few nights passed before Russell again demanded "Killaloe," backing the request with threats which grew more fierce, as he realized that their

fulfilment was not necessary. Again and again, Lycidas sang the song through all its length, feeling the shame fresh every time. He no longer had illusions as to his voice. He knew that Russell's pleasure was not artistic. Of course he could have complained to Hobbs, told him of the threats employed by Russell while he slept, or let them be fulfilled one night and then complain of bullying; but he had learnt at least one sound lesson from his reading of the stories, that sneaking is, at school, a sin totally beyond forgiveness. He endured in silence. But at the end of term, he asked Mr. Alton, without giving any reason, whether he might change his dormitory. The House Master, without fully understanding the request, saw that it had to do with Russell.

When the next term came, Lycidas found that he was still in E, but that Russell had departed. As if, however, some power had resolved to mock his efforts, he also found that they were now in the same form. He had risen rapidly in the school, and was in the upper division of the Upper Fourth. He had hoped to get his remove into the Shell, but he had failed; and Russell, whom he had outstripped, got moved into the lower division of the same form.

It is a custom that all the boys of a House who are in the same form should meet in a

certain study after breakfast, and make a last combined attack upon the construe which they have, presumably, prepared the night before. The system relates originally to friends; but if a tweak should happen to be in the same form as a new boy, he will frequently honour him by a common discussion of the Classics, and it often happens that the new boy chances, as a rule, to do most of the talking!

Russell, to the relief of Lycidas, made no such proposal for the first few days of term. He did his 'strues with McCormick, footer captain since Hollins had left, but cursed with a lack of both intellect and energy, and so doomed to stay in the Upper Fourth, till tardy superannuation drove him forth. McCormick had not spoken to Lycidas, since they had parted studies, and it seemed probable that the Upper Fourth contingent in Alton's would not unite to form a 'struing party. Lycidas was well content to have it so.

But in the second week of term, while he was alone in his study working (the others had gone out to join in 'struing parties), the two suddenly broke in upon him, and Russell said, in a friendly voice—

“I say, Don Q., have you done the Xenophon?”

Lycidas was pleased that he should call him by his nickname, and said “More or less.”

“Give us a ’strue, then, like a good sort,” McCormick broke in.

Lycidas ran through it, hoping that this might be only an exception: they would still do it by themselves. But next day, and the next, they came in, as if by arrangement. Gradually, they seemed to cease any effort to make it out for themselves: they relied on Lycidas. This was not strange, nor did Lycidas complain, since their translations had more freedom than fidelity about them, except when they trusted to that aid which is often called a key or crib, but at Shrewsbury a cab. They had brought a cab in on the first day.

Lycidas had made no protest. He remembered Eric’s stirring words, “I don’t deign to crib; it is not fair,” and smiled at their memory, but did not use them. Lycidas had grown in wisdom. But, indeed, he had no great moral objection to the use of cabs. One could do almost anything with masters, so long as one took the chance of being “nipped” and punished: it was only when one couldn’t be punished that it was mean to do things; he had heard Macrae say it was mean of Old Boys to smoke in the House, because old Alton wouldn’t like to nip them at it. . . . So he wrestled with himself, and decided that there was nothing terribly depraved in cabbing. But at that

moment, when he was just settling down, his one aim was to rise in the school as quickly as possible. He saw that he had no chance of being so good at games as to win influence from them: he must rely upon his place in school. If once he could be a monitor, he would have some power in the House.

To this end he worked. He did not find it necessary to give hours of the afternoon to it, and so gain the odious name of "sap"; it was enough, if he did his 'strues with average care (which, as a quick worker, he could compass in the hour and a half allowed for preparation), and then attended while in school. But to remember the 'strue until exam.-time, he must have worked its meaning out by his own efforts; the sense borrowed from a cab soon left his memory.

Thus, on mere grounds of utility, he knew his piece of work each day and gave Russell and McCormick little cause to use their cab. They came to expect Marsh's 'strue as a fixture, and ceased to trouble about doing it themselves; they always remembered just enough to "worry through somehow," with cautious eye kept a line or two below the passage under notice at the moment. So much did they come to rely on Lycidas that when, one morning, he failed them through having had a headache the night before, McCormick waxed indignant.

“Not done it? Good Lord, Russell, he’s not done it, the little beast! We shall have to manage on the cab.” And, later, he pointed out to Lycidas that next time he would jolly well get kicked, to which Russell added a fierce, “Yes.”

There was no next time. It was not only that Lycidas feared the threats (his weakness still left him over-prone to timidity), but he was no adept at picking up the meaning of a passage from the hurried reading of a bad translation. He trembled through all second lesson, blushing purple (so he thought) whenever the form master glanced about to find the next translator, and afterwards he marked the passage as one to be carefully tackled before examinations. This would mean a beastly sap, just when the school concert and other excitements would be coming on! Lycidas henceforth took good care that there should be no need to fall back on the assistance of the cab.

And Russell, setting this result down solely to the threats of jolly well getting kicked, exulted.

“Done the Xenophon, Don Q.?” he would ask, as he came in, each morning; and often the next comment was, “A darned good thing for you.”

Lycidas, however, during this term, saw more good qualities in Russell, who could be unusually



charming, when he wished to be. Perhaps he was grateful for those countless 'strues, but whatever the cause, he was certainly more genial to Lycidas. Yet he adopted the tone, always, of a "tweak" talking to a nobody, and was not for letting Marsh lose sight of the fact that such kindness was the merest condescension.

In one way this was good for Lycidas; it spurred him on to greater energy. In his ambition to gain power, he almost unconsciously pitted himself against Russell. All the time, there was a latent rivalry between those two. Lycidas felt the other's condescension, which did not worry to be scorn, and set himself to make an effort.

He lost no chance of playing football and cricket, not with a hope of excelling Russell, who was in the School Third Eleven this year, but because Mr. Alton had said he must be good at games to get influence in the House, and above all he threw away no opportunity of gaining knowledge useful for examinations. He also gyrated wildly in the gymnasium, having recognized that in school life, at any rate, the rule of force and the survival of the fittest are no mere barren catchwords of philosophy. Lycidas did not put it so, but he stirred himself, and between games, study and gymnastics, soon found himself too busy to be anything but happy.

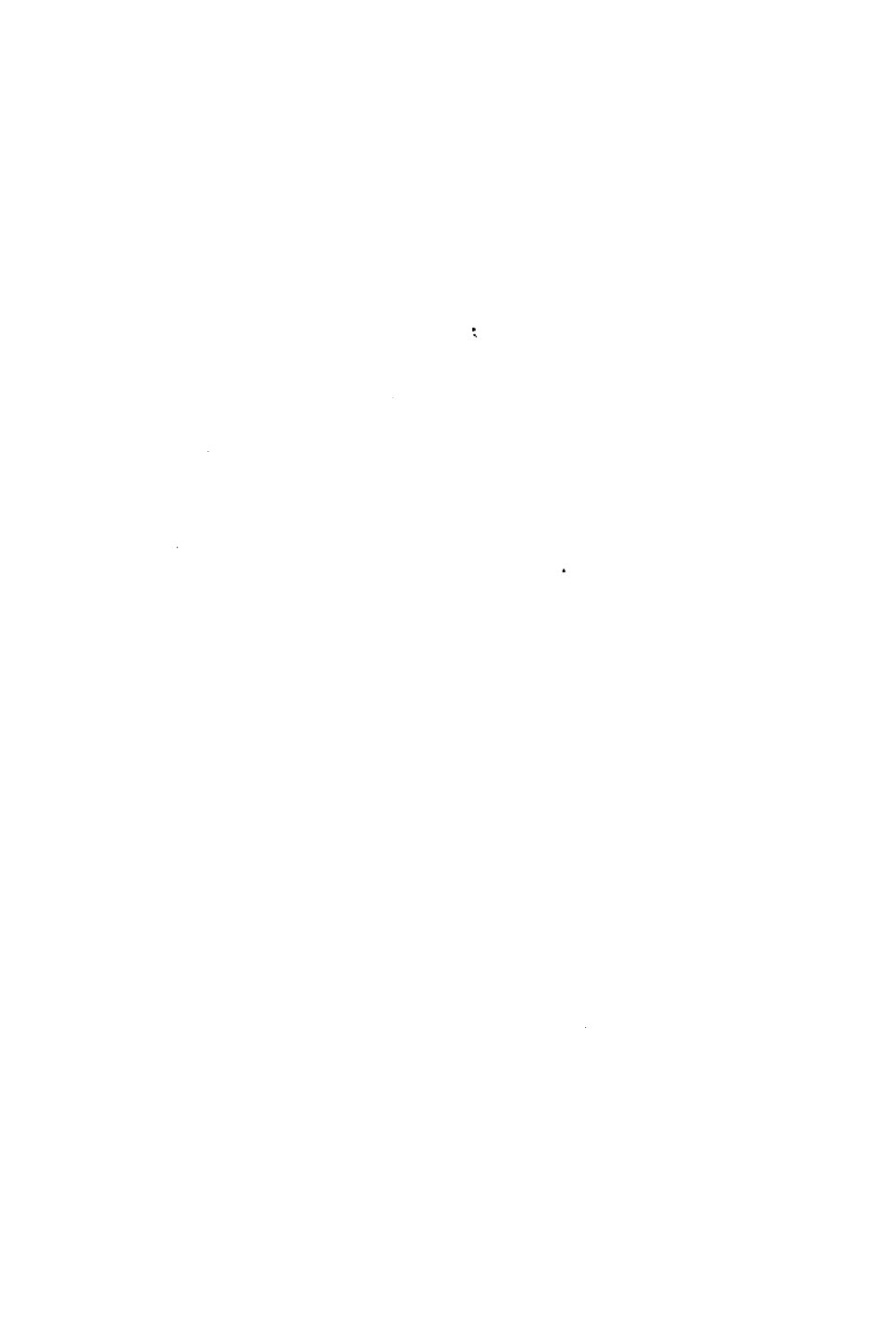






Photo: F. R. Aronpage

“ HE DID NOT EVEN FLINCH BEFORE A SCHOOL RUN, IF REASONABLY SHORT ”

In the winter term, he took to running. He slopped his way through all the House "tows," and did not even flinch before a School run, if reasonably short.

To such purpose, too, did he work, that next term he gained a double remove. Lycidas was now in the Upper Shell, and need no longer fear that Russell, of the Lower Upper Fourth, would ever again form a member of his 'struing party.

Thus did some power, perhaps that malign imp of Destiny, who flits across the pages of our subtler novelists, wash these two once more together on the waves of life, and then whirl them off again on different tracks.

## CHAPTER XII

### SEE-SAW—UP!

So the terms went by, seeming endless in their passing, but as nothing in the retrospect.

It was only the apparent gradual shrinking of the big fellows, that made Lycidas at last realize his growth. Hollins, Macrae, Skelton—all the giants of his own first days had gone: even Hobbs and McCormick were no more: and Kelly was a monitor—yes, Kelly! Kelly was more: he was a præpostor! How different from Parker, Parker who had towered over him at his first swill, Parker who had caught him in the act of losing Grouse! Alton's was certainly not what it had been! The House was going to the dogs!

Then Mr. Alton put a succession of new boys into his study (doubtless he was described to them as a "good steady fellow"), and they regarded him with stammering respect. They expected, he soon found, to wash his tea-cups *for him*: one of them, from home, once called

him "sir"! He was encouraged to begin swiping them: and they took it as a painful honour.

He was looked upon as one of the big fellows!

That theory came to him as a genuine surprise, but fitted the facts too thoroughly to be abandoned. He looked about him at House call-over one evening and realized that now, close upon four years after his arrival, there were few boys taller than himself. He was, literally, one of the big fellows! Lycidas smiled to himself. The notion was so utterly ridiculous.

Had the gods, then, of his early terms been clay, just like Kelly and himself? He threw himself back and remembered Vincent the insulted, Parr the avenging, 'postor, weaklings worse than Kelly. Then to his mind there came the criticism passed on Parker, that first morning, "Rather rough luck; but so like Parker!" Parker, then, had not been faultless; yet how, beneath his hate, he had respected him! Had Macrae, too, been a mere ideal? No, that Lycidas would not believe!

These other discoveries were painful to him, like the shattering of any illusion, but also they brought confidence. If more than half the House looked up to him, why should he still be so humble?

He passed his position in review.

He was in the Remove: he had been, in these

days of short schooling, as long at Shrewsbury as all at Alton's except some eight or nine; and though to play for the second House in football and sometimes cricket was no great athletic performance, it at least showed great keenness in one so new to the games, and saved him from the fatal charge of sapping. He had no lack of friends now, too, though but for Kelly and Evans they were mainly his juniors.

Lycidas thought it all out, saw how he must seem to others, and put the whole thing from him. He had outgrown the age where his own personality seemed a subject of absorbing interest. He had ceased to worry as to whether he was made to be an Eric or a Stalky, and as a result he blossomed into neither. He was (here lay Mrs. Marsh's chief complaint against Shrewsbury) a normal boy—between the two. If, as reaction from his old egotism, he lacked his proper share of self-confidence, at least, given an emergency, he need no more rely for guidance on the pages of a printed volume.

Once, indeed, when he had finished his library book, he reached up for the school stories (moved faithfully to every new abode), and found them deep in dust of years. He took *The Hill*, blew its grime across a new boy's desk, and settled to enjoy it.

But it was depressing, somehow, to read it all

again : it conjured up the mistakes of four years ago. What would his life here have been, had he known school, had he been able to play games? He was happy enough now : but what about that second year? He hurried through the pages, but enjoyed one hearty laugh over the dramatic scene in the House Master's study and over the different effect of his mild imitation. He was still uncertain about sublimated spaces, but he saw, and snorted at, the author's meaning.

This later reading of *The Hill* would call for mention in any record of the growth of Lycidas, if only because it restored in all its freshness the memory of that first Bump Supper, of the Old Boys' ardent keenness for the "dear old School." And now when it came back to him, he was more of an age to understand. So far, his partisanship for the House had rather blinded him : he thought he could feel now how it would be. From the day that, with this book in his hand, he felt the spirit of the Public School thrill through him, he became every term a firmer lover not merely of Alton's, but of Shrewsbury.

This was, in part, a natural result also of his greater happiness ; for it is not easy to love a place whilst one is far from happy in it.

He began now to see things in a different



light. The monotony of school life, relieved by no forgeries, drunken orgies, thefts, or other properties of fiction, is yet broken, to him whose interest is roused, by rivalries, by victories, by quarrels, by "rows," by countless trivial occurrences. And these no longer bored Lycidas : they seemed bound up with him, because bound up with his House and School.

His interview with Mr. Alton, at the end of his fourth year, quickened his interest still further. The House Master announced that, as Lycidas had been some time in the House and his conduct had pleased him, he would find himself, next term, a monitor.

"Now mind, I expect great things from you," said Mr. Alton.

Great things ! Lycidas had not heard the phrase through four long years. His mother had always told him that he was to do great things, and he had thoroughly believed her. Now he was to be a monitor. Would he be capable of doing even this thing well ?

- It was rather like his first arrival, coming back that term. He could feel everybody's gaze upon him ; there was a different manner with those boys who shook his hand ; the older monitors seemed doubtful. He could fancy the universal cry, behind his back : " Good Lord ! *Marsh* a monitor ! "

Russell, indeed, who had not spoken to him for more than a year, openly came up and said—

“Gratters, Marsh, on being monitor. You’ll be no end of a tweak, now.”

Lycidas saw that it was meant unpleasantly, could even hear the muffled laughter of Russell’s satellites, but could not frame a fitting answer. Yes, it was terribly like being a new boy again.

He was grateful to the Dook for not putting anybody very grand or very noisy in his dormitory, but as it was, he trembled as he turned the handle. Even the new boys seemed to him to be amused.

But all went smoothly. A little sleepy talking, as befits the start of term, and then an early yawn before “Good-night!” Lycidas dreaded saying it: what should he do if somebody ignored the hint, and went on talking? When he had said it, and a silence fell, the monitor was every whit as glad as the most nervous of the envying new boys!

The slackened discipline of the first days when, bent on auctions and on “swaps,” the boys are allowed to roam at will, even in lock-ups, from door to door, freed him from the need of asserting his authority as yet. But this was little kindness: it merely increased his diffidence. It seemed to him that he would have



no power to stop a row. How could they possibly respect him?

The chance to test it came on Monday night during lock-ups. A sudden scuffle sounded at the far end of the passage, and as doors opened, more flocked to the scene of conflict. The biggest boys are in these two end studies, and the voices which came down to Lycidas did not encourage him; this was a *mêlée* of tweaks. He waited, timorously, for a minute, hoping that it might subside, or that another monitor might come. But Kelly he knew to be with the Head, and the monitors of the end studies were most obviously out. It seemed that he would have to go.

The two boys in his study stared at him. They did not know him well, and Lycidas imagined them to be exulting. Would he funk? If so, the House would hear the story during teatime!

But, of course, he must not. With a sinking heart he opened the door and walked slowly up the passage.

It was as he thought; half-a-dozen of the biggest men were scuffling at the passage-end, beside the pipes. He tried to think what he should say, hoping that his voice was firm.

And of a sudden, to his vast relief, somebody cried, "Look out! Here's Marsh!" and all

bolted to the nearest door. Even to Lycidas the suspicious, there was no note of scorn or of amusement in the cry or in the general flight. It would of course have been wiser for him to clinch the victory by opening the door and asking what on earth they thought they were doing. But Lycidas walked to the end and back again. He was well pleased with this his first triumph—which was, rather, the triumph, not of Lycidas, but of the monitorial system.

In any case, it gave him confidence, and soon he came to revel in the sense of power. It lent an altogether novel savour to the old routine.

There were changes, too, which it demanded in the life of Lycidas, who was resolved, at any rate, to do his share by setting smaller boys a good example. By his code of honour, there were certain things that had to go. Catapults, for instance, were great sport, so long as one ran the risk of being nipped by monitors or 'postors; but when one grew into a monitor, they were impossible. Smoking was another thing that was now unthinkable. Lycidas had never really enjoyed his few secret cigarettes, and this was a renunciation which must not be set beside the world's great martyrdoms. Swearing, too, despite his early *Stalky*-fed ambitions, had never been a favourite hobby: he had found it not so much immoral as (to set one word to his

unspoken theories) bargee-like: but now, if he had to stop others swearing, he must be specially careful not to let a stray word slip in public.

It might be thought that Lycidas read into monitorship a cessation of his boyish pleasures, that he took himself as master more than monitor. Nobody need worry as to this, who reflects that he was not only monitor, but boy. The pleasure gained from good resolutions has never been denied even by the keenest advocates of right for right's own sake, and it is further to be noted that Lycidas saw no reason to discontinue such small indulgences as dormitory "rags." Old Alton would be horribly sick, if he came and nipped him: but there was no harm in it, and he took his fair risks! During the first week he led his little band of six against Kelly's larger dormitory; only to be repulsed with ignominy and loss of two pillows: for six nights he hung a metal trouser-stretcher on the door to rouse his garrison by rattling, should Kelly choose the watches of the night for a retort.

In this way, but rather adopting courses than analysing motives, Lycidas fixed what could be done and what could not, and kept as close as boyish nature will allow to his determinations. As the days went on, he became surprised at his own *growth* of coolness. At the first sound of a row

in lock-ups, he dashed out, nor did it occur to him that the row, once stopped, should start again. Even the ordeal of his first call-over passed without disaster. Russell made small attempt to hide his jeers; but Lycidas read through the list of names with outward calm.

But it was an episode in his dormitory, the well-known D, that finally proved to him the powers which he now possessed.

The third corner-bed had fallen to a certain Nisbet, only in his second year, but put above his equals by his skill at games, in many ways a second Russell. Lycidas came up one night to find him further proving the similarity by throwing boots and books at a new boy, who ducked and cowered underneath a shielding counterpane.

“Oh, stop that, Nisbet!” said Lycidas. “We don’t want any bullying.”

Nisbet dropped the boot he was holding. As he turned aside, Lycidas heard him mutter something about Quixote and school bullies. Obviously, that old tale was handed down! Lycidas did not doubt the reference, nor did he fail to see that, left alone, Nisbet’s cheekiness would grow. He had learnt the folly of letting things slip, or of fixing them with feeble compromises.

“What did you say?” he asked quickly.

"I—I wasn't speaking to you," stammered the other.

"Well, bring a brush here," said Lycidas, throwing his work-books carelessly upon his bed.

"A brush! What for?"

"Because I tell you to," Lycidas answered in level tones, but with a slight quickening of his heart. What if Nisbet would not?

But Nisbet would. He bent over obediently and took his swipes, which were not of the gentlest, and then walked back jauntily, with an air of cynical amusement and of ultimate revenge upon his features, for the benefit of new boys. But all this had vanished when he turned his face to Lycidas. Nisbet was indignant: he felt vaguely that the thing had been unjust. But probably it did him good!

Certainly the incident helped Lycidas. He no longer wanted confidence, no longer felt that he need bow even to Russell. He had gained that influence which he desired: he was once more somebody in Alton's.

It is part of Shrewsbury's system that a boy's gradual advance in the school-order should bring him corresponding privileges. His weekly pocket-money doubles; he can write lines, or "penals," instead of going to detentions; his "merit money" flows (or it may!); he does his preparation in







*Photo : J. Della Porta*

“THE LITTLE ALLEYS, TWO SIDES LEANING LOVINGLY  
TOWARD EACH OTHER”

*To face p. 201*

his study and no longer in "Top Schools"—by such a judicious policy is appeal made to the boy's ambition by his love of creature comfort!

Lycidas appreciated greatly the new freedom gained by his post of monitor. To be able, at will, to wander through the old-world, winding town, set, like a second Rome, upon its seven hills, came as a novel pleasure to him. He delighted in the sudden dips: in the quaint old wooded buildings with their crooked windows; in the little alleys, two sides leaning lovingly toward each other; in the nondescript street-names; in everything that had not struck his youthful eyes, when he had made his early, terminal excursions in search of penny fans and lemon-squeezers. That he might take another down into the town with him was yet a further source of pleasure. Besides his strolls in all the by-ways of the picturesque old town, he gave his Sunday afternoons to long, quick walks with Kelly across the fields which lay beyond the narrow Bounds, or to delightful strolls along the verdant fields which frame the winding Severn's course. It came almost as a shock, one evening in the summer term of this fifth year when, standing by the Chapel's end, he realized that all which he had seen in these long rambles, paled for beauty by the side of what he saw before him. He leaned upon the railings and gazed long at



the Severn bending its slow course below the Quarry's towering limes. Certainly, he knew nothing to compare with this. Why had he not noticed it before ?

This was the happiest of years for him, and Mr. Alton, on his side, was more delighted than surprised at his success as monitor, though in truth it had passed even his great expectations. Towards the end of this summer term, he called Lycidas into his study.

"I want to have a serious talk with you," he said.

Lycidas during these last years had divined that the Dook might possibly object to his looking solely at the fire-place, even in the summer-time when fire was absent from it: and now unless the topic threatened to be dormitory rags or other little disagreements, he made a point of looking, once or twice, as straight at Mr. Alton's face as Mr. Alton looked at his. It did no harm, and seemed to please the dear old thing !

So, conscious at the instant of no lecture in store, he sat in the familiar chair by Mr. Alton's desk and gazed pensively at him. The master, for his part, stared for a moment thoughtfully at Lycidas, as though considering a formed decision. Then he spoke—

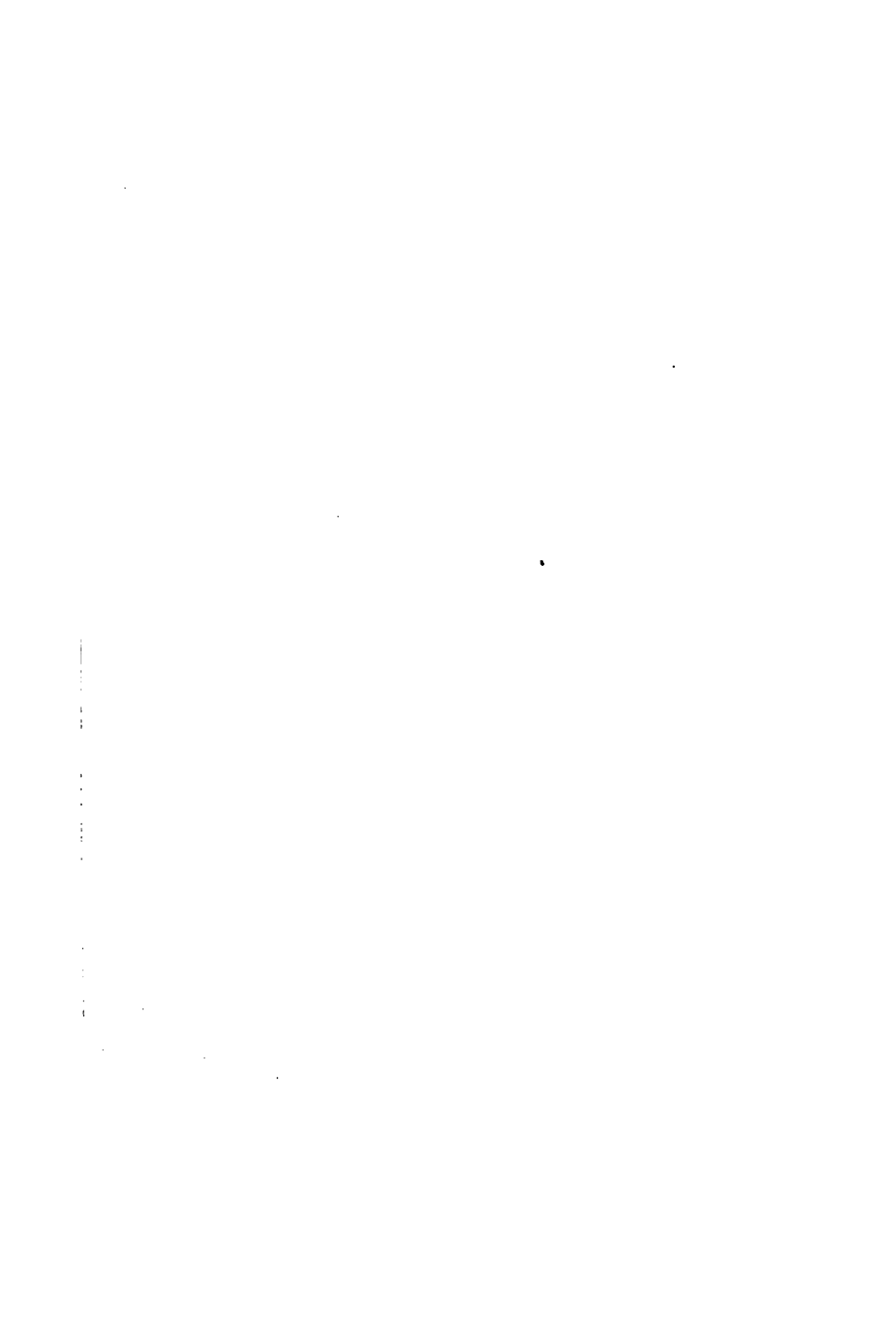
"I've been very pleased with what you've done for me this term, Marsh: you've helped me



*Photo: W. W. Naunton*

“THE SEVERN BENDING ITS SLOW COURSE BELOW THE  
TOWERING LIMES”

*To face p. 202*



a great deal. Now I want you to do more for me. Next year, I shall make you my Head of the House."

Lycidas started, and no words would come through his mingling of emotions. First, delight; then, the old timid self, asking in effect, "Is there never an end? After I am used to being a monitor, must I now get used to being Head of the House, with all its greater responsibilities?"

Mr. Alton seemed to read his mind, for he smiled ruefully and said, "Always the same diffident Marsh! Thinking that you wouldn't make a good Head Boy—now, aren't you?"

Lycidas blushed. "I thought Evans would be Head next term."

"Evans will be left Head in school-order," said the House Master, "but the Head in school-order is not always Head of the House, and Evans in any case is only one form above you, in the Middle Sixth. Rather a descent after a series of præpostors! Why, we've often had the Head of the School—I hope we're not becoming an athletic House, and nothing else! eh, Marsh?" He recalled himself from the excursus and returned to his main subject. "I have usually made this exception so as to gain the influence of some *tweak* as Head Boy: but I do it in your case, because I have confidence in you and also because I want to see you with still more con-

fidence in yourself. Try, Marsh! There's no fear of your being called *lifty*. Make up your mind that you can do what you set yourself to do."

Lycidas left the study, some minutes later, with quite other feelings buzzing in his temples. He wished that Evans had been Head. He was quite contented to be monitor. A different Lycidas, this, from that of five years back, who thought he could do everything!

PART THE THIRD  
REGENERATION

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## CHAPTER XIII

### DISUNION

THE position of Head Boy in a House may seem a sinecure to any one who never went to school, and may seem little more to any one who never became Head Boy: but, indeed it has claims to the journalistic epithet of "arduous." Its rigours lie, as a rule, less in what happens than in what might happen at a moment's notice. The boy is not the easiest of beasts to manage, and, to mix the metaphors, the volcano upon which the Head of the House exists can never, even in its calmest moment, be declared extinct. He has always won his post, in part at least, by intellect, and the duel between brain and brawn knows no boundary of time or place—it is ubiquitous, eternal. One false move, one blunder in tact, and the Head Boy may find the furious tweeks around him!

Kelly, on his last day at Shrewsbury, pointed this all out to Lycidas in other terms—

"Keep a firm hand on the House, Don Q.,



won't you? There's rather a rowdy lot coming on, and you'll have to be careful. Try not to have a real row, but keep your eye on Russell. Well, good-bye, and good luck! I hope I'll be down for the concert. I wish I was coming back again next term."

"Good-bye," said Lycidas. "I hope you'll like Cambridge. I shall be all right."

He rather resented the advice—from Kelly. It was not that he had grown to think much of himself; but he thought rather less of Kelly. Quite a good sort in his way, but—— In fact, something like the verdict generally passed on Lycidas four years ago!

But at first the warning was, in any case, not needed. Term began with every sign of peace, and Lycidas was surprised to find that his first days as Head of the House were not, after all, so terrible an ordeal. Nothing seemed much different from the time when he had been an ordinary monitor. He had, of course, to take the first week of call-over, but this had no more terror for him, and otherwise life went on very much as it had gone before. Lycidas felt rather strange as he wrote his first House notice, signed his name, and pinned the paper on the board, but no one pulled it down again, and no one seemed extensively amused. He settled to the routine. Breakfast and tea, however, witnessed one great

change this year. The monitors' table, which, like the Oxonian high-table, stands near the fire in Alton's Hall, holds eight boys, whilst the number of the monitors is six. This being so, the custom is that the Head Boy, after consultation with his fellow monitors, shall invite two more to share their glory, and the choice falls naturally on the two most popular boys, which is almost to say the two greatest tweaks at games. The honour is coveted, and some tact is often needed in distinguishing between candidates with almost equal claims.

This year there was not much doubt as to one of them. Directly Lycidas mentioned the matter in Head Room, which is the sanctum of the monitors, it seemed to be an understood affair that Russell, at any rate, should be invited. He had both his footer and his cricket "firsts," would indeed, next term, be secretary to the Football Club. Besides, he had been in the House five years. With Evans and Lycidas, two monitors, he shared the honour of being "House patriarch." There was no question whatsoever about Russell; indeed, many men thought Merops (Kelly had found him this name) should have been made a monitor; but Mr. Alton disagreed.

Lycidas, feeling the irony of it, went and asked the boy who once had bullied him, to come and sit at the Head Table.

"Thank you, Don Q. ! Your obedient servant is much honoured," answered Russell ; but he said it pleasantly.

Lycidas, indeed, noticed during these meals what he had observed before, that Russell could be very charming, even sympathetic, when he wished to be. They got on far better, these two, during this third period in which Fate's caprice brought them together. Lycidas began to have hopes that they might finally be friends, as at first, and bury all the intervening memories. Yet he never was quite at ease with Russell ; there was always the uncomfortable feeling that he was being laughed at, as by one who knows that he holds all the honours in a game of chance. Russell seemed always to behave to him as to an inferior. It was to be observed, though boys are seldom observant, that Russell called Marsh "Don Q.," yet Marsh never called him "Merops." In very truth, he scarcely dared to do so.

Russell, however, was agreeable enough at meals, where Lycidas sat in Mr. Alton's high-backed chair, or in Head Room, where he might be supposed supreme ; but seldom spoke to him elsewhere. His politeness had obviously points in common with that demanded of a guest to host. For the rest, he bore no enmity to Lycidas : he merely disregarded him as lacking interest.

Still, Lycidas was well content. He no more longed for Russell's friendship in the fuller, more romantic sense; it was enough that, to the House at large, they two should seem on equal terms, talking freely and sharing their provisions.

In the body of the Hall endless little fellowships exist for this partition of jam and other edibles, added to the Spartan but hygienic fare provided by authority. Sometimes two, sometimes four, they band together, and when the term begins, make high revel of hams and tongues presented by foreseeing parents; but as it ends, the menu falls to humble sardines bought at the School shop by hard-saved pocket-money. Each of these co-partnerships is called a "firm." At the Head Table, however, all eight share together; it is one big firm, and the eatables are on a more ambitious scale. More is brought from home, and even when the end of term brings threats of bankruptcy, the eight take turns to load the board with eggs, if with nothing more magnificent.

Lycidas, indeed, realized that he did not provide quite so much as Russell and some of the others. Mrs. Marsh gave him what she thought a liberal supply, but these brought better stuff, he saw, and much more of it. He came to feel a little awkward as his small ham supplanted some one else's towering pork pie. J. EVANS, &c.

his left, was certainly in the same condition, and so was Darlington upon his right, another monitor who owed his place mainly to work: but this made things no less embarrassing for Lycidas. He began to feel that Head Table was divided, if not to the House's eyes yet to his own, in two divisions, over one of which he lorded it and, over the other, Mitchell, who combined a position in both the School Elevens with a place in the Remove.

Mitchell was an easy-going person, of whom Lycidas was fond. As their forms, the Third Sixth and Remove, do the same work, these two shared a 'struing party.

It was towards the end of the first term as Head of Alton's that Lycidas noticed Mitchell to be obviously ill at ease. They were in Lycidas' study, after lunch, going through the Plato for third lesson.

"Let's hurry through it," Mitchell had proposed, as he came in.

Haste was not his speciality, nor was he an even tolerable actor. It was quite obvious, even to Lycidas, that he was nervous. He had the air of one who has to face a task not relished, and Lycidas was full of questions which he dared not ask. Yet even so, he had not long to wait before he got his answer.

'Strue over, Mitchell usually slammed his

book, saying the last words in a raised tone of relief, and hurried forth to find a friend for a last stroll upon the Common, before going down. To-day, however, he stayed, and with a bad pretence of naturalness, lolled back against the panelling.

"I think things are going fairly well so far, this term," he said.

"It seems all right," answered Lycidas. That one of the sporting monitors should discuss the House's state was an innovation greatly to be wished, but Mitchell's whole manner showed that something further was to come, something, too, not altogether pleasant. Had he scented scandals which called for a "row"?

Mitchell hesitated awkwardly, then blurted out, "I'm not so sure about our table."

"Why, what about it?" asked Lycidas, guessing the reply.

"Well, we didn't know—we thought perhaps—don't you find the sharing rather awkward?"

"I don't think so, no." He felt a brute, not helping the blundering creature out. He saw his meaning well enough, but hoped that by pretence of misunderstanding, he might silence him and so avert the danger. It would never do for the whole House to realize that the monitors were not at one.



"We thought, you know," Mitchell went on, his eyes bent upon the oilcloth floor—and Lycidas guessed that the thought had not been his—"we thought you and Evans and Darlington wanted to spend less on grub, and well—we thought we'd have 'slays' more often and it might rook you too much, that's all."

"Slays" are spreads, ambitious beyond all imagining, ordered from the Shop, and would, indeed, soon "rook" Lycidas, with his small purse; but he must not give in: at worst, he must economize in other ways.

"Well?" he said, feeling far more a brute than ever.

"Oh, we only thought it might pay to make two firms of the table—that was all." He looked quickly up at Lycidas, then down again.

"I wish you'd drop the idea, Mitchell," answered Lycidas. "*I* can afford slays, all right: I hope I've not been mean in my share? Of course, I don't mind starting a second firm, so far as I go: but it'd be beastly bad for Alton's. We mustn't let the House think the monitors don't get on together: Darlington gets ragged in his dormitory, as it is. Do you mind? I think we'd better drop the scheme."

"It isn't really my scheme," stammered Mitchell; "some of the—Russell thought it rather a good tip, and——" (He dragged out his

watch.) "Hullo! it's five to. Talk to Merops about it."

He was gone, in confusion, leaving everything with Russell—Russell the undoubted author of the scheme. Lycidas had little time to gather his ideas together, before he had to hurry down to third lesson. Every one had started, and he walked down the centre path, alone but for the uncheering company of his reflections. Why had Russell started this idea? Why did he wish to do what had never been done before? It was in any case "lift" of him, a newcomer, not even a monitor, to try and revolutionize the table: but why had he desired to do it? Was it simple greed, the mere desire for better food? Lycidas always vaguely suspected Russell of a continued rivalry, chiefly perhaps because he was himself conscious of the sentiment. Was this another effort to ruin his prestige, to lessen his influence in Alton's? Certainly, it would do him no good: cut off from the tweaks, doomed to share a firm with the humble Darlington and Evans!

The advent of the master gave Lycidas a chance to put the worry from him. He tried to forget all about it in attending to his work, and took an altogether unaccustomed quantity of notes. But it came flashing back and back again to him, bearing each time a little thought that helped to



a conclusion; until at the end of third lesson, without having realized that he had been debating it, he found the question answered. He must nerve himself, and take Mitchell's advice. He must have it out with Russell.

Yet he was a little nervous as, having learnt that Russell was alone, he crossed the passage and went into the study opposite, during that evening's lock-ups. He dreaded this interview with his old friend: he knew what gifts he had for making one feel in the wrong, below him, and an utter fool!

Russell was sitting at his desk and, on Lycidas' tap, hurried a magazine beneath a note-book. He thought it was the House Master's knock. He looked up, toil-weary but flushed, from his note-book, and at the sight of Lycidas he seemed surprised. Marsh did not often enter number eight, unless he knew that Mitchell was inside.

Lycidas felt awkward, almost as though entering a master's study. Why had Russell got this power of making him so ill at ease?

"I came in to talk to you about what Mitchell was saying," he said, shutting the door, as the other made no remark.

"What was that?"

"He said you wanted the table split into two firms."

"I? What, did—— No, we——" He

flustered hopelessly. He had specially told Mitchell not to bring him into it, and the monitor had not been in since, to warn him of the afternoon's fiasco. Lycidas was secretly delighted.

"*Didn't* you want it, then?" he asked, diplomatically.

But Russell had had time for recovery. "Yes—at least, we all did. It wasn't me specially. We all thought it would be rather a good tip."

"Mitchell said it was your idea, and I've come to ask you a favour, Russell. Do you mind giving it up? I dare say it's a good enough tip—I shouldn't mind it a bit—but it'll look as though the monitors weren't united. It's never been done, you know. We shall have to give it up for the sake of the House."

"Oh, hang the House!" Russell burst out, "or rather *don't* hang the House; but that's all rot. It won't hurt the House. Whatever difference can it make to the House? That's all *Eric* rot!"

Lycidas flushed slightly at the memory. "I know what you're thinking of, Russell. When we first met, I was a little ass, full of rotten ideas: but this *isn't* rot. I bet you anything it would be awfully bad for Alton's. So do you mind not sticking to it?" Lycidas longed to end the interview: he hated asking favours of Russell.

Russell, for his part, did not seem inclined to grant them.

"I've told you," he answered, hotly, "it's not specially my idea. So what's the use of asking me? You'd better go to Mitchell. *I'm* not a monitor."

Something in his tone roused Lycidas, and this game of battledore and shuttlecock between the two annoyed him: Mitchell had told him to go to Russell!

"I *know* you're not a monitor," he suddenly flashed out. "That's why I think it's rather cool that you should try to alter our arrangements. I'll see Mitchell."

He went out and, before his hand let go the handle, had repented. He had practically accused Russell of "lift"!

Was not this a casting of the gauntlet?

But nothing seemed to happen. Russell was as genial as ever at tea that evening, but always with the same tinge of kindly condescension.

Next evening, however, it was Mitchell's turn to find the firm with luxuries for tea, and only ten poached eggs arrived in place of sixteen. When the dish came opposite to Evans it was empty.

Lycidas said nothing, then or afterwards. To object now would only mean a public scene and open rapture: to object later, would probably

mean the old subterfuge of referring him from one to the other and then back again. He considered that even an ignominious compliance is more dignified than a protest which has no effect.

Next day he brought in six eggs.

## CHAPTER XIV

### 'SCENE IN THE HOUSE'

STILL self-conscious to excess, Lycidas over-rated the effect of this split upon the House. There were, of course, a few who exulted, such as young Nisbet, rapidly climbing to fame in the paths marked out by Russell; but many never even noticed it, and of those who did, many sympathized with Lycidas. He, however, imagined that every one had seen at once, and was chuckling at, this fresh humiliation.

With this belief before him, he set about things with a new energy. He had, some terms back, enlisted in the Rifle Corps, and had also joined the Literary Society, called after a Salopian worthy, "The Halifax," to say nothing of the Dark Room Society. In all these spheres, as well as in his games and his gymnastics, he showed the greatest energy, not so much in a deliberate hunt for popularity, as from an indefinite desire to prove a general keenness; he

would do everything he could, even if no good at games.

Evans perhaps had noticed this feverish longing to be up and doing.

"I say, Don Q.," he said, one day at the opening of the Easter term, as they were wandering about the Common, "why don't you come down and talk at a debate, one night? It's rather a good rag, when we light on a decent subject—a real ram of fellows there."

"Why this sudden keenness?" asked Lycidas.

"Oh, the last man's left, and they've made me president, or whatever it is, this term, for some reason or other." Evans spoke in an off-hand, almost injured, manner. He was clearly flattered.

"And so you're on the hunt for victims?"

"Yes, I think it's rather sickening that so few of the bigger men come. We usually get a master or two and about twenty small kids, with a good ram now and then when we've got ghosts or something topical to talk about; but even then no one speaks except the usual set. Of course, we don't want Firsts and men who'll rag—especially not now: I can't remember a bit what the last man used to do."

"So you want me to come and see you make an ass of yourself."

"No I want you to come and make yourself an ass."

"You need no making—you're an ass already!"

Lycidas laughed at the glum Evans, and then said "Rough luck!" He had grasped the elements of school-boy humour, which are that the joke must be made entirely obvious, that it must involve a *tu-quoque*, and that its perpetrator should laugh far more than its auditor.

"Oh, don't rag!" said Evans. "Will you really come? There'll be nobody much there, so it doesn't matter if you *do* make a muck of it."

This last prospect seemed to tempt Lycidas. "What'll the debate be?"

"I don't know, anything. Won't you move something?"

Lycidas preferred to make his maiden speech in a less prominent position, and Evans suddenly remembered some one who would broach a motion. It remained only to light on a topic.

"I want something new and on the spot," said the president, in a lordly manner. "They usually have Corporal Punishment or Woman's Suffrage, or some old bunkum like that."

Lycidas suggested a number of subjects which appeared to him both new and on the spot, but none seemed quite to hit the presidential fancy. Some were too complicated, some too beastly simple, some would hurt the masters' feelings. The two pored over the newspapers daily, trying to extract a subject from the headlines. Mean-

while, the night of the debate drew on, and the notice must be put up soon. The idea of speaking had rather appealed to Lycidas, and he did his very best to think of something genuinely new and on the spot. He was so engaged, about a week later, when Evans suddenly came bursting in.

“I’ve got it!” he cried. “A simply stunning subject.”

“*What?*” said Lycidas, in admiration.

“Capital Punishment!” Evans brought the words out slowly, impressively, like a lady coyly unpacking, before her friend, *the* bargain of the summer sales. He fondled the words, so to speak, and held them up for exhibition, stepping proudly back, to notice their effect on Lycidas.

It was not very great. “Capital Punishment!” he repeated, and then laughed. “Oh, clever Evans! How new! How on the spot!”

“Oh, shut up!” Evans retorted. “At any rate, you thought of nothing better! It came to me in third lesson, and I call it rather smart.”

“How exactly did it come? Tell me the symptoms.”

The president seemed hurt. “Do you think you’re being funny? Because you’re not. I suppose you mean it’s an old subject? Well, it isn’t. I looked it up in the *Salopian*, and it’s not been used for over two years, and there’ve



been lots of executions since that. So it's rather a snork for you!"

Lycidas did not seem very crestfallen, but Evans did not wait to watch. He had scored off Marsh, and must now see about getting a mover and opposer for the motion. The first he soon secured, but when he had been round all the regular debaters, nobody was found who would oppose.

"I say, won't you do it? You might!" Evans said to Lycidas. "The motion runs like this, 'That in the opinion of this House capital punishment ought to be abolished.' You'd have to say it oughtn't to be, you know."

"So I gathered," answered Lycidas, a trifle dryly, "but I won't, thanks all the same. I'll get up later on, though. You'd better oppose yourself."

"But I don't know anything about Capital Punishment. Besides, I don't think the president can—oh, yes, I believe he can though, if some one bags his chair. I suppose I might."

He wandered out again, with the furrowed brow of one on whom the cares of power weigh. He told Lycidas next day that he had made his mind up in the night. He would oppose, himself.

"I can read it up in *For and Against*," he added. The little book, with arguments for and

against all measures, is much used in Shrewsbury's essays and debates. Evans turned to *Capital Punishment*, and wrote out all the "Fors" upon a slip of paper. Lycidas, for his part, secured a volume of essays from the library, and leant his head upon his hands in earnest study. They were both a little nervous when the evening came, but their diffidence was nothing to what it would have been had they known certain facts.

The Debating Society at Shrewsbury is not very exclusive; in fact, all above a certain form are by that mere fact privileged to enter. Russell was amongst those who had been elected, but, so far, had not cared to insist too much upon their privilege; the debates seemed to him to promise little sport. When he heard that Marsh was going to make a maiden speech, the case was different. Lycidas' reputation had, indeed, died slow, and it was commonly supposed that the first time on which he did anything was liberally worth the seeing. A crowd had watched his first attempts at manual with the Corps, and, put on his mettle by these pleasure-seekers, Lycidas had shown himself above the average recruit at drill. Even this had not availed to kill the superstition. When Russell heard of this debating project, he went about exhorting all the tweaks at Alton's to attend, that night.

They all agreed it would be quite a rag. But of this Lycidas knew nothing.

He guessed it when he entered the form-room in which debates are held. Some fifty boys were there, and close on half of them had come from Alton's. Before he took a seat, he recognized Russell, Mitchell, Nisbet, and a dozen others of actual and would-be tweaks. He mentally decided that he could not speak.

But once the business of the night began, he swamped his terrors in his interest. He had never been at a debate of any kind before, and all the ceremonial was new to him. But for this, he might have divined that it was also largely new to Evans!

This last felt much happier once he was through with it, and had called upon the honourable mover to open the debate. He leaned back in his chair contentedly, and tried to collect the points as given him by *For and Against*. He had wilted somewhat just before, under the scornful gaze of Russell and his company: he felt, as he went through the ritual, that they were wondering how he could make such an ass of himself! But he did not dread the actual speech-making, he was used to it. Besides, he had his six arguments in black and white. How did they run? One, capital

punishment is the strongest deterrent. Two, punishment must be preventive. Three . . .

Suddenly the mover's words broke in upon him. What was this that he was saying? He would briefly state six arguments fatal to the theory of capital punishment. Let the hon. opposer stultify them, if he could! In the first place, capital punishment was no deterrent whatsoever: criminal records showed that. In the second, punishment should be reformatory. In the third . . .

A cold fear broke over Evans with the horror of a discovery. The mover, too, had read *For and Against!* He was bringing out the six "Against" arguments, which were the "For" arguments with a mere negative inserted or left out! What should he say? He too had meant to "state briefly six arguments." *For and Against* was very brief. It did not bring support to any argument.

He gazed down on the mover, and could see all six points upon his memoranda. A brilliant notion came to him.

"I must call the hon. mover to order," he exclaimed. "He is reading his speech." He had heard presidents do that before.

The ruse had small effect. "They are only notes," the mover said, crumpled his paper, and went on as glibly as before.

Whatever should he say ?

He was still wondering how to act, when the need for action came upon him. The mover sat down, amid a clapping and a stamping. It had been a short but a strong speech. Those arguments seemed sound. The House waited to hear the hon. opposer duly "stultify" them.

Evans showed few signs of stultifying anything, except perhaps his reputation as a speaker. He could not very well simply deny the opposition's statements without proof or reference. He stumbled sadly over unformed periods, unfinished questions. He declared the hon. mover's statements to be puerile: but the safe card failed. The audience was not impressed. From the corner where the tweaks sat, he could catch ironic "Hear, hear!"s and undissembled sniggering. He sat down, feeling purple as to face and miserable as to soul.

Lycidas was further dismayed by this failure, which he did not understand: Evans had refused to lend him his *For and Against*. But, stronger now in his determination not to speak, he felt no personal alarm. He took a cool interest in watching the other speakers, in wondering what *The Salopian* would have to say.

*The Salopian*, as school-papers run, is totally beyond reproach. Sometimes, certainly, it tends to be truthful rather than literary, less æsthetic

than devoted to athletics, and complaints have even been known upon the score of punctuality. Still, on the whole, it is a decent, self-respecting, bi-terminal, modestly dressed in simple green; and even those who call it *The Slopper* have never charged it with habitual frivolity. Only when it has to chronicle debates does a change come over it. It is then that, to use expressive slang, *The Salopian* fairly spreads itself.

Of Evans, some six weeks later when he hoped the incident forgotten, it remarked—

“The hon. opposer then rose to reply, but overcome either by that exertion, by the weight of office, or by the excessive *hauteur* of his collar, soon showed apoplectic symptoms and resumed the presidential chair, amid an overflow of incoherent, and, happily, inaudible confusion.”

Lycidas knew this failing of the school paper, and its memory served to strengthen him in his resolve of silence, though the efforts of the later speakers were not such as to make him nervous of their rivalry.

A long, anæmic person, with spectacles far down his nose, got up next, and remarked in a sheepish manner that if you hung a man, you didn't give him any real chance of reformation. How much better to make better than to hang!

To him there rose a keen-eyed youth, who gave it as his firm opinion that the last speaker

wanted hanging. He honestly believed that it would do him good. That was all he had to say.

The fifth speaker rose after a long pause, and explained that he got up only because no one else did, but he really had not much to say. At this point he caught a friend's eye, and after an interval of paralytic, fish-like gasping, sought his seat. *The Salopian* summed this incident in a short paragraph: "A. B. Jones declared that he had nothing to say, and proved this neatly by then sitting down."

Jones was followed by a præpostor, who clearly imagined himself to be condescending in addressing such an audience at all. He was unable to say that the debate had added to his knowledge on the subject. He was inclined to go further than the fourth speaker. He thought that, for most of the orators, hanging would be a *capital* punishment.

Here he sniggered: it was obvious that he had made a joke, though one might never have divined it from the stony features of his audience. But when he said, "However, let me now be serious," appreciative laughter came from the back benches. Free of his humour, the præpostor made a good enough speech, though rather in didactic mood. He pointed out the various theories of punishment and

showed how one's views upon execution must follow one's idea of the aim of punishment. The end was greeted with applause by the more serious members, and it seemed as though some life might now be brought into the debate.

Appearances have always been deceitful. In the words of the sixth form critic, the patron of forensic art at Shrewsbury—

"E. Robinson was afraid that his views were rather unconventional; but this did not matter, as they also chanced to be inaudible.

"H. L. Thomas pointed out that if you give a dog a bad name, you practically hang him. This was a maiden speech.

"J. Davies opposed one of the hon. mover's statements, to his own apparent satisfaction."

At this point the debate hung fire. It was now that a master might have pieced the argument together, and made something for later orators to speak about; but it so happened that of masters there was none to-night. Evans rose and asked, after an awkward pause, whether there was any other gentleman who wished to address the House. His tones insinuated that there was, but no one answered. He fixed an official eye on Lycidas, in obvious invitation, and Russell did not lose the chance of crying, "Marsh!" Others took it up; there were



whispers, "Now, Don Q.," and shouts, "Marsh! Speech!" His neighbour nudged him; someone kicked him from behind; memories of the *Essay on Punishment* thronged in on him; before he well knew what he was about, he found himself rising in his seat, and standing there amid mock applause from Russell and his fellow tweaks.

Monitorship had lent him confidence. He did not stammer or break down; he seized on the præpostor's speech, as on the one thing solid enough for tackling, and pointed out what seemed to him some fallacies. Lycidas did not know much about the theory of punishment, could not be called an authority upon political philosophy, but he was soaked in his essay; and though his words perhaps reeked rather of their origin, he made a speech which, if not remarkable, at least shone among its fellows—in fact, to quote the journalist again, "a very sound debating effort."

Russell was frankly disappointed; Don Q. was not making an ass of himself, after all! Some of the earnest men in front were actually applauding points! This would never do. He had brought a lot of men here for a rag, and a rag there must be. He hid his mouth behind his hands, and started on a series of studied interruptions.

When Lycidas gave vent to a somewhat pompous sentiment, Russell cried, "Hy-ah, hy-ah!" When Lycidas, rashly venturing upon Platonic by-paths, mentioned distributive justice, he shouted, "Explanation!" (Exactly, had he known it, what poor Lycidas could not afford!) When Lycidas began, "I have said enough to show that——," Russell after the fourth word rapidly exclaimed, "Yes, yes!" Scarcely a sentence in any speech fails to offer a chance to brawlers who are not too critical of their own wit. Russell's satellites began to titter, but some of those in front cried out, a little timidly, "S-sh, s-sh!"

Evans, of course, heard; but also saw that Russell was the speaker. With a master present, had this happened, he would have boldly called him to order; as it was, he funk'd. Russell was a wild person, and one could never tell quite where he would stop. A retort of "Order, yourself!" or "Order what you like!" was the very least to be expected. There might even be a proper scene, Cromwell II breaking up the House! The president kept silent, with a fatuous pretence of being so rapt in the speech as not to hear the interruption. Only when, afterwards, Russell rose and said, coolly, "May I propose a vote of thanks to Mr. Marsh?" did Evans answer, very mildly, "No, sir; order,

order!" Both he and Lycidas were much relieved when it was over.

"It wasn't a bit a fair sample," said the president to Lycidas, as they walked back to Alton's. "None of the good speakers were there."

"Except *you*," answered Lycidas, a little cruelly.

"Oh, shut up! It really was a putrid meeting. I wish you hadn't come to-night."

"So do *I*," came the answer, with a mournful emphasis.

Evans was surprised. "Why, you rotter, you made about the best speech of the night, though that's not saying much, I know!"

But Lycidas had not been thinking of his speech, only of Russell's running commentary thereupon. To this he attached a much graver importance than did Russell or any of the others present. To them, it had been merely a friendly rag on old Don Q.; Lycidas saw in it another of Russell's attempts to make a fool of him before the House. And he honestly believed that the House, in consequence, thought him a fool.

Russell was certainly pleasant enough when they met, later on, in Alton's.

"Well done, Don Q.; a jolly fine effort! Hope you didn't mind my ragging?"

But this did not appease Lycidas. He did

not mind what Russell said to him in private, though he still felt the longing for his friendship. What he did mind was this continual attempt to humiliate him in the eyes of Alton's. Why could not Russell, the popular, the successful, leave humble Marsh alone?

The strange thing about the whole affair was this: it never occurred to Lycidas that most of Alton's might be on his side.

## CHAPTER XV

### AN EARLY SKIRMISH

THE Easter term is never specially exhilarating. Football is expiring: Cricket has not yet begun: the Sports sometimes provide two amusing days, but more frequently two hailstorms: and every one is rather glad to reach the holidays—the holidays which, when they end, will lead to nothing more terrible than the ever-charming summer term. Alton's this year had made a gallant, though unsuccessful, effort to gain the Sports Cup, and Lycidas, by dint of endless training of body and exercise of will, had developed into a sprinter and actually won the Hundred Yards. He had also played once or twice, without getting his colours, for the House Eleven; so that, though he could not count himself a tweek athletically, he felt that he had shown himself keen, and even done something for Alton's.

Incidentally, though this did not touch Alton's, he had been up to Oxford and had



passed "Smalls" and "Matric." His form master had hinted that any attempt at a scholarship would be labour lost. Lycidas was rather hurt, but not sorry to escape the necessary "sap." He felt quite happy as he was. Still, he too welcomed the ending of the dreary term.

By this time, he enjoyed his holidays again immensely. His mother still thought him a little bit too wonderful for his tastes, but she no longer treated him as a baby, and as he found more in common with her, he grew to love her even more dearly than before. She, on her side, delighted in his growth of mind and body, almost bursting with the pride of him, though she still at times remembered, with a sigh, the dear days when he wore black velvet suits and made sweet remarks, which she could tell to her friends, who seldom, however, seemed sufficiently amused. As to Mr. Marsh, he saw less of his son (he was secretly a little jealous of the attention given him), but thought that he seemed going on all right. Rather a vandal, perhaps, sometimes: but then, he reflected, he had been the same at that age. Oxford had made him a poet. Perhaps, she would do the same for Lycidas! Mr. Marsh still often told his wife that his son must *do* something, must not dream his life away, as he himself had done;

but deep within him he had other hopes. Lycidas was less ashamed now of his father: he had got used to his wondrous ties.

Still, summer term had many attractions, and he would see even more of home, when at Oxford with its generous vacations; Lycidas was not sorry to be back at Shrewsbury. This last term, which he had scarcely realized to be his last, he seemed to be so far more at home on his arrival there; friends were glad to see him, masters beamed on him with a new geniality, the Schools themselves appealed to him almost as a personality which offered welcome. He settled down in his bed, that evening, with very different feelings from those of the first night, close upon six years ago. And the early weeks passed by delightfully. His ever-growing freedom; Mr. Alton's new attitude, as of colleague rather than of master; friendly games at cricket; charming afternoon trips up the river; long peaceful walks, unhampered by the terror of præpostors—a thousand things united to make these weeks the happiest of Lycidas' school career. Late in it, too, he had begun to explore the Old Schools, raising their grey heights close by the railway station. Standing in the ancient rooms, he forgot all the trappings that make of them a town museum, and delighted to repeople them with the boys of







*Photo: W. D. Hayden*

“THE TWO OLD FIGURES GAZING SADLY DOWN UPON THE  
SEEDY PATRONS OF THE LIBRARY”

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centuries ago. He never tired of trying to discover how the rooms had been distributed. It seemed so impossible, that even thirty years back, the Schools had been confined in these cramped quarters! He liked to imagine the difference. Gradually he began to feel fond of these deserted courts, once thronged with boys, now loved by nobody, and of the two old figures, Polymathes and Philomathes, gazing sadly down upon the seedy patrons of the library. He would look at these two in pity, and wish that he could take them up to the New Schools, where they would be! Even the devoted Evans called this occupation slow, and Lycidas usually made these excursions alone, after second lesson. When he had satisfied his budding soul, he would walk through the quiet stone-paved lane that leads to Palin's, the old tuck-shop famed in song, and there in the quaint-shaped old rooms would slake his hunger and conjure up yet more Salopians of other days. Usually, however, he found no lack of present-day Salopians. "Palin's after twelve" is a school institution—to those, that is, with the envied right to go "down town." It needs pluck to enter it, without!

In such ways, then, did six happy weeks go by. There was but one shadow cast across it all for Lycidas; and this no novelty, but—Russell!

Perhaps in proportion as he saw his school life safely ending, Russell grew more reckless. Of Lycidas, Evans, and Darlington, he took no notice whatsoever; and the three athletic monitors took no notice of him. He seemed to do exactly what he wanted.

Lycidas and Mitchell were sitting in Head Room one night, when suddenly shrieks and a commotion rose from the far studies.

"Good Lord, what a filthy row!" cried Lycidas, and rose to stop it.

"Oh, it's only Russell," protested the other monitor.

That was Mitchell's usual attitude. Anything that Russell did was "only Russell." Lycidas did not see things in the same light. It seemed to him not only unfair, but also very bad for Alton's; once the idea got about that if one were strong enough and good enough at games, one could do simply anything, there would be no point at all in having monitors. Things would end merely in the headship of the strongest. He was always careful to go out and stop Russell's rows, just as much as anybody else's. He did not, of course, adopt quite the same tone to him; it was of protest rather than of command; and Russell, with some calm retort, usually kept quiet for a minute, and presently began again.

This worried Lycidas. More licence is, rather

naturally, given to the bigger fellows, in whose "rags" the monitors frequently take part: and Lycidas did not mind so much about trivial affairs. But not all of Russell's escapades were trivial. Everybody knew that he had several times descended, by night, from a window with a conveniently loosened bar (the bars are made of wood in prudent Alton's); and when Lycidas consulted Mitchell as to this, he got an answer—

"Oh yes, I know! I always give him a help out, though if he's nipped, he's agreed to tell the Dook that I knew nothing of it. He's done some awfully smart things."

Here followed samples of his smartness, practical jokes of every possible description, mainly committed on the houses and property of other masters. They were very mild, and the masters next morning had probably taken them for accidents rather than jokes. They were also singularly harmless.

What Lycidas disliked was that a monitor should help Russell to break an important rule, and above all, that everybody in the House should know of it. This, however, Mitchell would not see, and as he was in charge of Russell's dormitory, nothing could be done without making yet a further rift between the monitors.

It was close upon half-term, when Lycidas dis-

covered another of Russell's little habits, which had no connection with any of the monitors.

There is, in Alton's, a damp and gloomy cavern, perhaps in technical language a cellar, where the pipes are heated and (I know not) possibly the beer kept cool. A narrow staircase drops steep to this unattractive home of mystery, which is considered out of bounds. A glimpse from the stair-head does not beckon one to further scrutiny, but unimaginative and photographic people have been known to linger there and to emerge with negatives properly developed. The supposition is that it is dark.

Lycidas, like most of the House, had not explored it, but been contented with a downward glance. He could not imagine that any one should wish to enter. A different theory was, however, presented to his notice when, as he stood one day close to the stair-head, drying his hands outside the downstairs swill-room, Russell suddenly emerged. The abrupt change from dark to light had dazzled him, it may be, for he did not seem to notice Lycidas until he stood on the last step. Then he gave a little exclamation, halted a second, and came forward. Lycidas could not possibly ignore him.

"That hole's meant to be out of bounds, you know, Russell," he said, pleasantly, attaching no great import to the incident. Rule-breaking

with Russell was not a rare occurrence ; but it seemed a mistake absolutely to pass over such an open instance. It would look as though he funked saying anything.

“I don’t wonder, Don Q.,” laughed Russell. “I don’t feel drawn to it, myself, again !” This was the average tone of his replies. Lycidas, however, noted one peculiar fact. Russell, while talking, stamped twice, as if casually, on the floor and raised his voice as he said “Don Q.” to such a pitch that the unnecessary words were almost uttered in a shout. After six years of experience, Lycidas was not fool enough to miss the ruse. Clearly, there were other men below ! He hesitated for one moment whether he should go below and nip them—smoking probably—and perhaps a part of his old timidity had weight in his decision. He did not fancy going down to nip possibly half-a-dozen tweaks in a dark cellar ! What if they rushed at him and stormed the staircase ? He would find them out later, of course, but—— ! Lycidas had always a morbid dread of being humiliated, and as these ideas flashed over him, he also thought of Russell’s triumph, should he go down and find the cellar empty. Russell’s signs had certainly been strangely obvious. Suppose they were intended to make him suspicious !

He threw his towel down. “No, I should

think not," he said, rather meaningly, and strolled into Head Room. He was glad, afterwards, that he had said no more; there was no possible "score" for Russell in what had occurred! He let the incident drop from his memory, after a vague wonder as to what Russell, alone or otherwise, had been doing in the room downstairs. He could of course have gone down, now, and tested his theory as to smoking by the sense of smell; but this hardly occurred to him. He had not caught Russell smoking; so there was the end. Except in very serious cases, detective-work is not considered to fall beneath the duties of a monitor. One either nips a man red-handed, or—one does not nip him. But this borders on another chapter of those school-boy Ethics!

Lycidas, in any case, rapidly forgot the incident. It was brought back to him with startling vividness exactly one week later. He was on his way out of the House at about quarter to four, and on a half-holiday every one is as a rule outside. But at the moment that he turned the passage corner, he once more saw some one come from the dark staircase. It was Russell again. And with him, this time, was young Nisbet. Lycidas went up to them.

"Is there any one else down there?" he asked.

Russell said nothing, and Nisbet, after a pause, answered, "No."

As Lycidas hesitated a moment, he saw Russell calmly start to stroll away. He did not call him back; he wanted time to think. He wandered round the Common, puzzling the thing out, until call-over snapped the thread of his reflections. But he had decided: he must not let this matter drop. If he did, Russell would despise him, as well as the whole House, and rightly. They would think that he had funked attacking Russell. . . . Yet he did not want a row; it would spoil his last weeks, and it would be bad for Alton's. . . . Could he not warn Russell, ask him as a favour to pull up? Yes, he would go to Russell afterwards. He had decided that, before the first notes of the bell rang out.

But Russell had been coming up to "change" for cricket, and after call-over, was nowhere to be found. Lycidas, on a sudden impulse, knocked at Nisbet's study, number nine, and heard his treble voice reply, "Come in!"

Nisbet was now fifteen, looked thirteen in face, sixteen in figure, and owned the intellect of, possibly, eleven. He was, as I have said, in many ways, a second Russell. But ever since his ignominious swiping in D dormitory, he had felt a great respect, though possibly no large quantity of love, for Lycidas. He looked nervous at his entry.

Lycidas went and stood with one foot on a



but deep within him he had other hopes. Lycidas was less ashamed now of his father: he had got used to his wondrous ties.

Still, summer term had many attractions, and he would see even more of home, when at Oxford with its generous vacations; Lycidas was not sorry to be back at Shrewsbury. This last term, which he had scarcely realized to be his last, he seemed to be so far more at home on his arrival there; friends were glad to see him, masters beamed on him with a new geniality, the Schools themselves appealed to him almost as a personality which offered welcome. He settled down in his bed, that evening, with very different feelings from those of the first night, close upon six years ago. And the early weeks passed by delightfully. His ever-growing freedom; Mr. Alton's new attitude, as of colleague rather than of master; friendly games at cricket; charming afternoon trips up the river; long peaceful walks, unhampered by the terror of præpostors—a thousand things united to make these weeks the happiest of Lycidas' school career. Late in it, too, he had begun to explore the Old Schools, raising their grey heights close by the railway station. Standing in the ancient rooms, he forgot all the trappings that make of them a town museum, and delighted to repeople them with the boys of





*Photo: W. D. Hayden*

“THE TWO OLD FIGURES GAZING SADLY DOWN UPON THE  
SEEDY PATRONS OF THE LIBRARY”

*To face p. 239*

centuries ago. He never tired of trying to discover how the rooms had been distributed. It seemed so impossible, that even thirty years back, the Schools had been confined in these cramped quarters! He liked to imagine the difference. Gradually he began to feel fond of these deserted courts, once thronged with boys, now loved by nobody, and of the two old figures, Polymathes and Philomathes, gazing sadly down upon the seedy patrons of the library. He would look at these two in pity, and wish that he could take them up to the New Schools, where they would be! Even the devoted Evans called this occupation slow, and Lycidas usually made these excursions alone, after second lesson. When he had satisfied his budding soul, he would walk through the quiet stone-paved lane that leads to Palin's, the old tuck-shop famed in song, and there in the quaint-shaped old rooms would slake his hunger and conjure up yet more Salopians of other days. Usually, however, he found no lack of present-day Salopians. "Palin's after twelve" is a school institution—to those, that is, with the envied right to go "down town." It needs pluck to enter it, without!

In such ways, then, did six happy weeks go by. There was but one shadow cast across it all for Lycidas; and this no novelty, but—Russell!

now, which *isn't* Eric rot. I don't know how often you've been down that place, or what you do there, but I want you to say you'll drop it. Will you?"

"Why?"

"Well, it's not allowed, for one thing. But you know that's not the reason. As I say, I don't want to know too much, because I don't want to get you bunked." ("Thank you!" threw in Russell, but not with the same note as Nisbet.) "Possibly there's no harm in it. But, either way, if it goes on, I shall simply have to make a row about it."

"I don't see the need." Russell was as cool as ever. He had infinite belief in his capacity for bluffing Marsh.

"Well, you know best. But I've pretty good reasons to think that if the Dook took the thing up, you wouldn't be so pleased."

Russell tilted his chair back and laughed bitterly. "How just like you, Marsh! You've been bullying Nisbet into sneaking, and now you'll go and sneak to Alton!"

The taunt roused Lycidas. "You know there's no sneaking about it, Russell. Nisbet told me nothing—I just said he wasn't to go there again with you. I—I told him to drop you." That said, he gathered courage. "I say, Russell, you must see, really? I know you always try to

naturally, given to the bigger fellows, in whose "rags" the monitors frequently take part: and Lycidas did not mind so much about trivial affairs. But not all of Russell's escapades were trivial. Everybody knew that he had several times descended, by night, from a window with a conveniently loosened bar (the bars are made of wood in prudent Alton's); and when Lycidas consulted Mitchell as to this, he got an answer—

"Oh yes, I know! I always give him a help out, though if he's nippèd, he's agreed to tell the Dook that I knew nothing of it. He's done some awfully smart things."

Here followed samples of his smartness, practical jokes of every possible description, mainly committed on the houses and property of other masters. They were very mild, and the masters next morning had probably taken them for accidents rather than jokes. They were also singularly harmless.

What Lycidas disliked was that a monitor should help Russell to break an important rule, and above all, that everybody in the House should know of it. This, however, Mitchell would not see, and as he was in charge of Russell's dormitory, nothing could be done without making yet a further rift between the monitors.

It was close upon half-term, when Lycidas dis-

covered another of Russell's little habits, which had no connection with any of the monitors.

There is, in Alton's, a damp and gloomy cavern, perhaps in technical language a cellar, where the pipes are heated and (I know not) possibly the beer kept cool. A narrow staircase drops steep to this unattractive home of mystery, which is considered out of bounds. A glimpse from the stair-head does not beckon one to further scrutiny, but unimaginative and photographic people have been known to linger there and to emerge with negatives properly developed. The supposition is that it is dark.

Lycidas, like most of the House, had not explored it, but been contented with a downward glance. He could not imagine that any one should wish to enter. A different theory was, however, presented to his notice when, as he stood one day close to the stair-head, drying his hands outside the downstairs swill-room, Russell suddenly emerged. The abrupt change from dark to light had dazzled him, it may be, for he did not seem to notice Lycidas until he stood on the last step. Then he gave a little exclamation, halted a second, and came forward. Lycidas could not possibly ignore him.

"That hole's meant to be out of bounds, you know, Russell," he said, pleasantly, attaching no great import to the incident. Rule-breaking

with Russell was not a rare occurrence ; but it seemed a mistake absolutely to pass over such an open instance. It would look as though he funked saying anything.

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## CHAPTER XVI

### PEACE OR HONOUR?

THREE weeks passed, and Lycidas began to think that the incident was over. Russell, despite his calmness, had either been frightened or had seen that he was acting rather meanly, and had stopped. It was so like him to laugh at the protest, and then quietly to do what had been wanted! The relief to Lycidas was tremendous. Though he had felt that Russell could not be allowed to go on defying authority, he had also known that any, mildest, punishment given to him would mean an open rupture. He was settling himself to enjoy his last month at Shrewsbury, when disillusion came to him with its usual unkind suddenness.

When close on fifty boys are packed into one long corridor, it is natural that frequent scraps of conversation should be overheard. The "clapper," for instance, may be embarrassing,

as has been seen, to those who learn home truths about themselves, though it is certainly desirable as putting a check upon certain forms of language. It was not, however, through this admirable medium that Lycidas gained his new knowledge. He had been into the matron's room, and as he came out, he heard, in Russell's voice, "Oh, I shall be on the Underground, just then."

"S-sh!" said the other, as Lycidas went by.

This tactless exclamation set him thinking. He had heard countless references to the Underground of late, and without understanding, had not worried much about it. Catchwords at school rise rapidly, to die again, and very often have no meaning. But in a flash, he saw the sense of this. It meant that Russell had not stopped his visits to the cellar. It meant more than this. It meant that the whole House knew of them, and looked upon them as a joke.

A joke! The thought suggested something to Lycidas, who never undervalued Russell's subtlety. Russell, he knew, was not accustomed to be found out. Then, why was he so obvious here? Why had he allowed himself to be nipped twice at the stair-head? Why had his signs to

Nisbet been so noisy? Why had he let Lycidas overhear his plans just now?

Everything pointed to one fact. It was another of Russell's plans to make a fool of him before the House! Nisbet had been put up to it, and the fellow who said "S-sh!" had been put up to it. Nisbet's terror, too—all sham! Lycidas felt a desire to interview that youth once more with a hair-brush, and promised himself the relaxation. All a hoax! No wonder Russell had kept so wonderfully calm.

It was elaborate, but not too elaborate for Russell, especially when a chance occurred of making Lycidas ridiculous. No doubt, he and Nisbet had merely gone a few steps down, when they had seen him coming. No doubt, he had told every one to talk about the Underground.

But then the doubt crept in, after all.

Had there been nothing more? Would the idea ever occur to Russell? Would he take so much trouble over it?

In either case he must do something.

If it was a mere hoax, Russell had been making him a laughing-stock of the whole House, revelling in his defiance of authority, inciting every one to take part in ragging him, the Head

of the House! He could imagine the joy of small boys as they carefully spoke about the Underground before him. All the House was thinking him a fool!

The thing was fatal to the discipline of Alton's. Not only Nisbet, but a dozen others, would grow up to emulate the thoroughly successful Russell as head of the Anti-Monitors.

If, on the other hand, Russell had some real object in going down, the thing was even worse, and far more fatal to the House.

Something must certainly be done. But what?

It was no use asking Mitchell. Evans, when consulted, said that Russell was too big a tweak, he advised letting it alone. There was only a month more, and things would start fresh next year. Far best let it rip.

But this Lycidas could not bring himself to do. He knew that the House could never start fresh again next year, or any year, once there was a tradition that, given a boy strong and popular enough, he could do exactly what he liked in Alton's.

He could of course settle the matter by a compromise. He could tell Alton that boys went downstairs, not even mention any names, and get him to lock the door. But this he disdained. He had grown stronger in his two years

as monitor, and did not care to shelve the matter thus. The House would guess what had happened, and would conclude that he had funkcd. It would be a victory for Russell.

There was another course, not quite the same. He could report the whole affair to the House Master, in confidence, and ask his advice. But what if there really were some scandal behind it? What if old Alton contrived to find it out?

Gradually, he came more and more to think that there was no hoax, that Russell's carelessness had sprung merely from his contempt for the monitors. Evans backed him up in this.

"It's all jolly well," he said, "but if you tell the Dook, it'll probably end in him nosing about, till he gets Russell bunkcd. And I don't see what you can do, yourself."

That was it. What could he do, himself?

Monitors at Public Schools have no small powers; they can swipe, and they also can give lines. I need hardly add that the first privilege is most in use, for the giving of lines from boy to boy is deservedly not popular: there is something, if I may wrong an epoch, "Early Victorian" about it. Yet Russell was too big to swipe, unless solemnly before all the monitors in Head Room. Even then it was quite un-

thinkable. Besides, Mitchell and the others would not sanction it. No use to look for *any* help from them! Lycidas could not even consult half of his monitors: Russell had indeed wrought disunion in Alton's.

Should he give him lines, then? There was something ineffectual about it, and he could fancy the House sneering. Yet it would be a protest. Russell would have to do them, if given, or to leave the School. It would certainly lessen his prestige.

Yet, when he had reasoned himself into it, he felt that, after all, he could not do it. He went back to Evans.

"I say," he opened, "I've been thinking this thing over. I don't see how I can settle it myself, without all the monitors."

"But *why* settle it?" asked Evans. "There's no need to worry. You haven't nipped him yet. Why should you?"

"I must. Besides, he's sure to get in my way. If it's not all a rag, he loves flaunting it in front of me—he likes to show the House I funk him. Oh, I'm sure to nip him." For the moment his courage failed him, and he hoped that he might not.

Evans thought deeply for a minute. "Well, I know what. Pretend not to see him."

"And have every one *know* I funk'd? Why,

he'll only do more and more impossible things: in a week, we shall have no power left. I wish Mitchell and the other men were with us, then we could squash him easily. As it is, Evans, I see what's the only thing to do; I must tell the Dook."

"Tell the Dook!" cried Evans. "Why, good Lord, man, don't I tell you, that'd probably mean bunking for Merops? It'll rot the cricket, too. You can't sneak to the Dook."

It would rot the cricket, and would count as sneaking! These were two new points. Lycidas saw their truth, and felt he should have seen it sooner. If he got Russell bunked, Alton's would lose their best all-round man, and so probably the Challenge Bat. Besides, he did not want to get him bunked. He did not want to get anybody bunked, least of all Russell. He admired him, he had once even been nearly his friend, though later—— That was another thing—the House, knowing that Russell had once bullied him, might look upon this as revenge! If he told Alton, and it ended in Russell getting bunked, or even "requested," every one would think Marsh had chosen this way to get rid of his rival, Russell! For rivals they had always been considered, and though in the see-saw game of school, Marsh had gained official power, Russell had the most prestige. Would

they think that Lycidas had used that power, to do what his own powers could not avail?

He put on his straw hat, and wandered out alone along the roads, not noticing where he was going, only wishing solitude for thought in this first great problem of his life. For great it seemed to him, and his wits had not yet gained the trick of quick decisions and prompt actions.

Only two facts emerged from the thoughts which whirled madly round his brain. He could not let the matter slide, and he must settle it himself. When he came back to the House, an hour later, he was not much clearer, but he had decided those two points. He had tried the case in the court of boyish jurisprudence, and the verdict had been that to tell Alton would be sneaking; and sneaking was impossible. Besides, if Evans had been right, and that course would lead to Russell being bunked, it was the more unthinkable.

Lycidas did not frame the dilemma in such a way that he must ruin a friend or fail in his duty; that is a grown-up idea. Nor did he weigh the merits of doing his duty, as opposed to the preserving of his popularity in Alton's.

The difficulty came to him disguised like this:



if Russell stayed, it might affect the House's tone; if Russell went, it probably would spoil the House's cricket.

It is worthy of note that, in this period of questioning, his first thought was no longer for the good of Lycidas, but for the good of Alton's.

## CHAPTER XVII

### DUELLO

THERE had at least been no flaw in the chain of thought which led Lycidas to believe that he was certain to nip Russell a third time, although four days passed before the prophecy found issue. Lycidas made no attempt to hasten the incident: he still hoped, weakly, that it might be avoided. But when, just as suddenly as before, he was brought face to face with it, he did not falter. His mind was made up. He had given Russell a friendly warning, and Russell had not cared to take it. He went up to him, just as he had reached the top. Once again he had suspicions: it seemed strange that the cautious Russell should be so clumsy not once, but three times. He clearly wanted to be caught.

“Have you been down there again?” he asked as a mere form.

“Yes,” said Russell, casually.

“You know I warned you not to?”

"I remember."

"Well, you'll have to write me out ten penals, and bring them to me within four days."

Russell certainly seemed surprised; whatever his ideas, he clearly had not reckoned upon this. Lycidas could not help a moment of sinful pride as he realized that Russell had expected him to funk.

"Ten penals, did you say?" The tone was of incredulity.

"Ten penals."

Russell thrust his chin out in a manner peculiar to him.

"*Very* well, Marsh!" The phrase was a favourite with Russell, and, from his lips, meant an immensity. "How like you!"

"There's nothing mean in it," said Lycidas, answering the charge implied. "I warned you not to go there, and you've made no secret of going."

"Perhaps you'll tell me what I was doing down there!"

"I don't know—that's not the question. You're not allowed down there, that's all: and I told you what'd happen, if I nipped you again."

Russell looked at him, as in deep thought, for

a few moments. "*Very* well!" he said, and walked off, whistling gaily.

Lycidas did not trouble to go down. He had seen no one but Russell, nor did it much matter, he thought, whether there was anybody else: he had done what he wanted. He had given Russell lines to write, and Russell must either recognize monitorial power by doing them, or leave the School.

This happened at about six o'clock, and during the three-quarters of an hour which pass between that time and tea, Lycidas sat in his study, making an attempt to read. Nobody came in except Mitchell, who was friendly and had obviously not heard of the incident. Lycidas said nothing about it, and wondered whether Mitchell would be friendly later. Perhaps he should have told him? Mitchell was a monitor, after all. Still, Russell would let him know soon enough!

Gradually the House began to fill, and in the hum of talk Lycidas imagined comments on the latest piece of news. As, at the sound of the bell, he walked down the passage on his way to call-over, all whom he passed seemed to lower their tone at his coming.

In the central approach he met Evans, and as they strolled down, told him what had happened.

Evans appeared to feel surprise, but mingled largely with it, admiration.

“You *haven't*?” he said, with a little whistle. “Great Scott! What a row there'll be!”

His next remarks made it quite clear that he did not consider himself in any way bound up with it. The act had been Marsh's, not the monitors'. Lycidas realized that he must stand alone.

He had wandered round the Common with Evans, talking the thing over before going in to tea, and when he opened the Hall door, the tables were full, great waves of conversation rolling round, as of some breathless topic. The monitors, with Russell, were standing by the mantelpiece.

As Lycidas came in, there was a slight hush, and every one looked at him, furtively. He had got half-way up the Hall, painfully self-conscious, when a sound of hissing, mild but unmistakable, broke out behind him. Lycidas decided, in a flash, that it would be fatal to ignore it. He turned sharply, and the sound died away.

Lycidas was reminded of the days when it had fallen to him to restrain “Hall cheering.” Twice Russell had gained this honour for athletic prowess, and once Lycidas, as Head Boy, had had to stop its too long clamour. He himself

had never been cheered. And now he had to stop the hissing !

It might be thought that the incident would depress him ; and possibly, two years before, it would have. But this was a stronger, though still diffident, Lycidas. It is true that he read the hisses of a few to mean the disapproval of the whole : but this opposition nerved him, did not weaken him. He saw, now, that he must in very truth stand all alone, and this thought gave him power to do it. He walked the last part of the Hall, feeling a new, unknown, strength. He seemed suddenly, by some miracle, to have got above these others, to be looking down upon their pettiness from a dwarfing height. But this was a sensation, not a thought.

Nobody said anything to him, as he reached the table, and he went straight to Darlington and began talking easily, to that youth's utter embarrassment : *he* did not want to have a row with Russell !

As they sat down, Russell joking loudly with Mitchell, Lycidas looked up and said, " Finished with the toasting-fork, Russell ? " He felt a mad joy in forcing the other's hand.

Russell looked straight at him without a word, and did not pass the fork. In his eyes Lycidas saw the old twinkle—half amusement, half contempt.

This was not, on the whole, the pleasantest of meals for Lycidas, but he made a point of staying to its end, though Russell with transparent malice kept the conversation on school fixtures and athletics through it all, so that he had little chance of saying anything worth hearing. In the passage afterwards, he met Russell, and wishing to show that the official quarrel need not mean a personal, he said—

“Is it the Dook’s turn at top schools, to-night?”

Russell went by with no word. It was clear that he split no straws as to offices and persons!

Lycidas was sorry. The whole idea of a Public School seemed to him to imply that if a monitor found a friend breaking rules, he must nip him just as much as though he were a new kid. In trifles, of course, it was different; tweaks would naturally have some privileges; but that ought to be the case with big things. And if it happened, surely the one nipped ought to take it in a decent way. He ought to see that the swiping, or whatever it was, came not from the monitor, but from the system. It was bad luck otherwise upon a monitor, if he had either to pass things over or to start a feud. No one would be keen to be made one, on those terms!

unconsciously, was groping blindly  
at the answers of that great question, the  
y boys.

He, he had wished to serve the  
not get Russell into a real row,  
ended in offending both. He had  
of the House, then of Russell, only  
himself, with result that he had been  
the House, "cut" as an enemy by

happily, had passed the stage where  
he would have found comfort in the Aristotelian  
habit of contemplating his own excellence.  
He was engaged, rather, to explain it all to Russell  
in the House.

At moments, indulging his always latent sense  
of humor, he imagined himself going into Russell's  
office explaining that he had settled the thing  
for him, because he was afraid that old Alton,  
he knew, would bunk him; or better still,  
calling the House to a Hall meeting, and  
explaining how he had been guided only by  
his own conscience, how he had  
acted for the sake; how  
that this was  
what they  
could  
they  
do.



Lycidas had not himself imbibed the full reserve of boyhood, but its existence did not escape him; he knew such a scene was quite impossible; it would be barred. No! Things must slide. Every one must go on thinking him a prig who had given lines—lines!—to a double “first”; or worse, an envious smug who had used his authority to down a rival.

Such was the verdict on himself, with which Lycidas credited the House. It was not for four years, when age had vanquished school-boy reticence, that he learnt from an old Salopian that more than half of Alton’s had sympathized with him. It was, indeed, as he saw, a feud in the House, a duel of strength and hero-worship against official power. Every day that passed made the fact clearer, but Lycidas did not know that to his side must be added an unspoken, yet sincere, respect. He was a keen all-round man, the House thought, and had done his best for Alton’s. It was rather rough luck, Russell putting him into such a corner by ragging the monitors, and Russell was not taking the result quite like a sportsman. So the House at large; it was Nisbet, with his set, who had hissed, and Lycidas read into it a larger meaning.

But certainly the sporting monitors were

on Russell's side, and that made it difficult enough.

As he sat in his study, during "top schools," these thoughts kept coming to him, driving all his work away. The House was silent and half empty, during this time of preparation, but in the study opposite he could hear the low sound of many voices, with Russell's sometimes rising to an angry pitch. They were discussing the situation, and he could imagine with what comments on himself.

"I won't do them! I *won't* do them!" he heard Russell almost scream once, but the rest was a vague murmur. While he sat there, trying to forget it, the door of the opposite study opened, then his own, and Mitchell entered. He looked worried, as in anticipation of a nasty job, and Lycidas once again was sorry for the great awkward creature. All Russell's dirty work seemed to fall on him!

"I say, Don Q.," he said, "I've come in to talk about those penals you gave Russell."

"Why, what about them?" asked Lycidas. He always felt with Mitchell, as he suspected that Russell felt with himself. It was so easy to see through him!

"Merops says he's hanged if he does them!"

"Well?"

"Well, he'll get bunked, won't he, if he doesn't? Isn't the Head awfully keen on backing up the monitors?"

"Probably—that's the idea. But I expect Russell will do them, before that!"

This point of view staggered Mitchell. He gazed about in silence, and then blurted out what he had come to say.

"Look here, like a decent fellow, won't you let him off them?"

"No, of course I can't! Don't you see it's look like funk?"

"But why on earth did you ever give him them, then?"

"I didn't want to—all this is pretty rotten for me. But perhaps he told you I said I must if I nipped him downstairs again, and——"

"But he says he wasn't doing anything down there!" broke in Mitchell, triumphantly.

"Well, if so, it only shows what I thought before; he went there and bucked a lot about it after I warned him, just to show he didn't care a hang for the monitors, but could do what he liked; and as you asked, I gave him the penals just to show he couldn't!"

"But Merops is the biggest man here—he comes next the monitors."

"Yes! That's just why he shouldn't set him

self against us. You see how beastly awkward it makes things. If this had been a new scum, it wouldn't have mattered a hang!"

Mitchell's face fell. He had been well primed with arguments, and all of them had misfired hopelessly. Lycidas saw his expression, and also knew that he was a well-meaning person, only rather weak, and dazzled by the great god, Sport.

"I say, Mitchell," he opened, on a sudden impulse. "I know you all think me a pretty good blighter for doing this, and so I should be if I gave a tweak pensils for just going into Alton's cellar. But I didn't: I gave them him, because he's simply been putting himself up against us monitors, and this'll rot the House, if it goes on. You know, we ought to have stuck together more: I told you splitting the 'firm' was a bad tip. Now the whole House knows that three of you side with Russell. If any man went on ragging the monitors by letting the whole House know he did what he liked, we ought to have him up in Head Room before us all—that'd put him down a bit; but I knew you wouldn't. And I didn't want to tell Alton because—well, you say there was nothing else, but I thought there might be, and I didn't want to get him bunked. Do you see now?"

Mitchell saw. He had seen all along that the monitors should back Marsh up, but—well, Russell always played in the School and House matches with him, and they were in the same firm, and it would be dashed awkward; and besides, he was a double “first” and a jolly good sort!

He sat silent for a few seconds, sorry for Lycidas, but slowly considering his own position. He had been sent in to “ram” Russell off his penals: he could not go back and say that, after all, he thought Marsh right, and they must be shown up! But neither could he think of any argument worth stating.

“I think it’s an awful pity you gave them, all the same,” he said, simply. “I’ll try to make Merops do them, though—I have tried. But it’s beastly rough luck on the beggar. Penals to a tweak like him! Why, you might just as well have swiped him, right away!”

He went out, and Lycidas could hear him reporting progress to the meeting opposite. Not much progress, Lycidas reflected gleefully. The spirit of the fight had gripped him. He knew that he was acting for the House’s good, even though the whole House, with its monitors, should be against him; and he did not mean to yield an inch. Russell should show up his penals

meekly to the monitor whom he despised! At least, if no one else, Mr. Alton would be on the side of authority, if he should hear of the affair.

And after prayers, a tap sounded at the door and a small boy came in to Lycidas, left cruelly alone.

"Mr. Alton wants to see you," he said timidly, and bolted.

"Ah, Marsh," said the House Master, with a slight look of worry combating the smile of welcome which he now always gave Lycidas. "Come in; I want to see you. Sit down! What is all this about Russell? Mitchell tells me you have given him some penals, which he won't do! I'm to force him, or he'll get expelled, and spoil the cricket!" Mr. Alton gave a satirical little laugh, and drummed the table with his fingers. "Now what is the meaning of it all? Explain!"

"There's not much to explain, sir," said Lycidas, uneasily. "It's what you say. I gave him ten penals to-day, and I believe he says he doesn't mean to do them."

"Ten penals!" repeated Mr. Alton, in a raised tone of surprise. "Whatever for? I don't like all this giving of lines between fellows. What is it, now?"

"Russell has been setting himself up against the monitors, sir, for a long time."

"But there must be something definite, surely?"

Lycidas said nothing; he still scarcely liked to mention the cellar. Alton's curiosity would certainly be roused, and it would be terrible if his inquiries showed that Mitchell had been wrong in thinking there was nothing more behind it. It would be awful, if Russell got a further punishment; every one would think that he had sneaked. Worst of all, if Russell got expelled!

Mr. Alton wondered at his silence, and read it as doubt.

"Don't you think perhaps you were a little bit impulsive, Marsh?" he asked, gently. "It's not the amount of the punishment I mean; but Russell is a big fellow—one of our patriarchs!—I nearly made him a monitor. Do you think perhaps you could warn him?"

"No, really, sir, it would be fatal. I *had* warned him. It would be fatal to take it back now."

Mr. Alton suddenly looked older. "Very well," he said, with a sigh. "I trust you, Marsh—absolutely. But I'm sorry; I'm afraid it'll spoil the term-end for you and the House. I'm sorry, very."

“So am I, sir,” answered Lycidas in all sincerity. “But it could not be helped.”

“Well, I must make the silly fellow do his penals: I’ll speak to him later. I must go round the studies now.”

He rose, and Lycidas stood aside to let the old man pass, then went sadly back to his deserted study. When the bell for bed had rung, the two other inmates came in together to get their books, and after a few words to Lycidas, in tones forced by obvious artifice to those of every day, hurried out once more; they were both friends with Russell. Lycidas foresaw that these would be his relations with most of Alton’s right to the last day. Even Alton himself was not in total sympathy with him, but thought that he had been impulsive!

And, like the hisses, this universal opposition strengthened him. A moralist might say that he was fired with the great consciousness of right; a sociologist, that the primæval sense of conflict reappeared; but Lycidas did not analyze his feelings. He only knew that he had every intention of fighting to the bitter end. He no longer dreaded the gaze of his dormitory, but opened the door with a firm resolve to swipe every one and all who should show insolence in any form!



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the manner of the chorus, even a few words, by now: and hurled it forth, some venturing on variations, each keen to drown his neighbour's effort. The packed hall seemed almost to rock with sound.

When the School got too big for its acres—  
 Under Kennedy, Butler, and Moss,—  
 Ignoring the wild protest-makers,  
 The last moved the old place across.  
 So now—as in classics and science—  
 We leaven the Old with the New:  
 And still, ere we mournfully fly hence,  
 We cry at our leave-taking brew:  
 “Floreat Salopia!”

The second line caused, for the first time, cheers to interrupt the body of the song, but Parker went straight on, and with a cry of, “Now then, *all!*” burst into the final chorus:

Floreat Salopia! Floreat Salopia!  
 Down the channel of the ages rolls the great majestic  
 cheer:  
 Send it onward, Sons of Shrewsbury, worthy of your  
 Mother dear!  
 Boys and old boys, past and present, send it ringing  
 near and far—  
 Floreat Salopia!

And send it ringing they all did, ignoring the slight change in the third line, and with a long “Sal-opi-ar-r-r!” as though not wishing to

what she guessed, from her husband's comments, must be a trying period for the Head Boy, by asking him in frequently to tea or supper. Lycidas enjoyed these meals, and was grateful for the thought which led to them, but even with Mrs. Alton he could not unburden himself upon the matter, and his return to the boys' side of the House only served to emphasize the general coldness towards him. It was unfortunate that the many who felt for Lycidas, did not chance to be those with whom he was thrown most in contact.

The only hint, which he was given to show that Russell's view was not necessarily that of the whole House, came to him at the Bump Supper.

Since the famous race of five years before, Alton's had sunk on the river, had indeed been so low as sixth: but for the last two summers had been pulling up, and now ended second. Besides this, the House owned both the cricket bats (Lycidas having helped to win the second), the Inter-House fives, the swimming, the second football, and the gym. (for each of these last two Lycidas had also done his share): so that the walls and tables did not lack ornament, nor the evening noise. It must, indeed, have been a very mournful year for this last to be lacking at a Shrewsbury Bump Supper! Failing all else,

## CHAPTER XVIII

### REVELRY BY NIGHT

EVEN this new warlike attitude could not prevent the last three weeks of term from seeming rather melancholy to Lycidas. At mealtimes he had, of course, still Evans and Darlington to speak with, but the imaginary line between these three and the other five had become even more marked. The four at the other end sat joking with Russell, calling him "Merops" or "old man," and if Lycidas, as a protest, ventured to join in, his comment was received in an atmosphere not appreciably above thirty-two Fahrenheit. This began to weigh upon him, partly as boring, but partly also because such an open rupture among the monitors seemed a bad precedent for the whole House to witness. It would be fatal if the Head table at Alton's were henceforth split into sporting and non-sporting.

Mrs. Alton, with whom he had gradually struck up a real friendship, did her best to relieve

ever, the prospect of the speech itself that was spoiling his pleasure in the evening; it was the thought of its reception. Besides Mrs. Alton, there were several ladies present, and Lycidas felt that the public humiliation would be too ghastly, if he and his words were received in stony silence by the House at large. Certainly the Dook's reference to himself as an Admirable Crichton had been received with rapturous applause: but as the House had also cheered to the echo his remark that he was by no means satisfied with the standard of its work in school, Lycidas did not build excessively upon the fact. The reference to Russell, too, had been received with no less tumult. It was even possible, he thought, that no one listened!

But when the song was finished and Mr. Alton called on Marsh for a speech, there could be no doubt about it. From the far table where Russell and his bosom friends had somehow managed to get placed together, there was practically silence, a mild applause which, in contrast with the other, stood as merely protest; but from the body of the Hall there was a stamping and a clapping. Lycidas gained courage. It was no highflown oration, this, that he was called upon to make, merely a synopsis of the year's exploits. Everybody knows them: and the master has remarked

on them, but this is a good chance to cheer them once again! Each name was met with a great burst of sound. Russell, as befitted such a useful man, was often mentioned and his name greeted by wild catcalls from his corner, milder tributes from the centre tables. And when finally, as is the custom, the speech ended with the health of Mr. Alton, Lycidas' heart-felt words brought cheer on cheer, and rising on their chairs, the whole House drank the toast with every honour and all conceivable varieties of noise.

Lycidas felt happier. He began to suspect that he had imagined the main body of the House more hostile than it actually was. His speech had gone well, except for the fact that what he longed to say was just exactly what he must not utter. Personal explanations, always impossible, were never more impossible than at this moment. How the House would be embarrassed!

The ordeal over, or rather proved not to exist, he gave himself up to enjoy the evening.

Parker, his old friend of the swills (now a strangely small-seeming Parker), was down, and they had got on well together. Lycidas, his wounded feelings salved by Time, had enjoyed a hearty laugh with him over the towel episode, and found it a relief to talk to some one who knew nothing of his feud with Russell. Parker,

too, told him endless interesting things about Oxford and its ways, which he drank in with eagerness. They chanced, in passing, to be mainly true. Oxford, however, was now of the past to Parker, who had turned to Law. Mr. Alton had urged the claims of the Muses as antidote to this grim study, and the result lay in two songs "composed especially for this occasion."

The first of these, according to the yearly custom, was a topical effort, full of sporting exploits and excruciating puns on names. Sung slowly, with breaks so often as applause demands, this song provides a rousing chorus and sometimes institutes a nickname: but its real attraction lies in the fact that it provides (at the least) a third chance of howling, with a fresh surprise and joy, at the familiar triumphs of the year gone by.

Parker had done his work well. The tune was a rousing rag-time of the moment, and the words included a reference to "the trusty Marsh, that never let us sink," and to Mr. Alton's "*all-tenacious* grip upon our hearts," both of which pearls afforded fresh excuse for straining throats, which would croak raucously in chapel the next morning. The song was voted a success.

About the other, Parker was more doubtful:

it had no names to cheer, it glorified not Alton's, but the School. Still, the audience was not critical! This he was to sing himself, and he sat at the piano, amid endless cheering, which died as the first lines began—

When Edward the Sixth was a stripling  
And Warwick believed him a fool,  
The Severn went placidly rippling  
Past Shrewsbury, lacking a school:  
But Edward exclaimed, "By our garter,  
We'll alter this scandal ere long!"  
So he drew up a grand Royal Charter  
And set the boys singing this song:  
"Floreat Salopia!"

Floreat Salopia! Floreat Salopia!  
Down the channel of the ages rolls the great majestic  
cheer:  
Send it onward, Sons of Shrewsbury—honour to your  
Mother dear!  
Boys and old boys, past and present, send it ringing  
near and far—  
Floreat Salopia!

"Now then, chorus!" cried Mr. Alton. Parker had tortured an old swinging air to fit the melody, and from forty young throats it roared forth. No one knew the words, nor did they matter. All knew "Floreat Salopia," and this they howled. Then a hush, as Parker started once again, with cunning emphasis on "Lord," to make his line scan—



Lord Halifax and Philip Sidney,  
 (At Speech-day we hear of these men !)  
 With Greville, and more of his kidney  
 Sat through second lesson, at ten :  
 We're free to imagine them dowling,  
 Or shivering under the swills :  
 Our fancy may picture them howling  
 In antediluvian trills :  
     " Floreat Salopia ! "

The historian may doubt whether these customs date back to the sixteenth century, but history was the last thing to worry those who shrieked the chorus out again, "*Flor-eat Salopia!*" The singer was encouraged not to omit his third verse, as he had planned, should the reception be chilly.

Judge Jeffreys—but no, we *don't* mention  
 His lordship's ill-odorous name :  
 We prudently focus attention  
 On Darwin of anthropoid fame !  
 Yet they've both of them shown up their penals,  
 Perhaps in Head Room suffered pain !  
 And over their summer-term cenals  
 Be sure they roared out this refrain :  
     " Floreat Salopia ! "

Certainly, of those present, male and female, not one-tenth divined the meaning of both "anthropoid" and "cenals": but the using of strange words is regarded as a Sixth Form malady, and no one minded. The boys had got

the manner of the chorus, even a few words, by now: and hurled it forth, some venturing on variations, each keen to drown his neighbour's effort. The packed hall seemed almost to rock with sound.

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## CHAPTER XIX

### TEARING UP THE ROOTS

ANY one, arrived at what are called "years of discretion," would spoil the last months of a sojourn in a well-loved spot by mournful anticipation of the sad farewell. This, however, is not the boy's way: Lycidas, so far as Russell let him, had enjoyed this last term to the full, scarcely thinking that it was his last. Even the Bump Supper, with its allusions to the House's loss next year, had not brought the fact really home to him: he had been, at first, too nervous, then too busy enjoying the evening for itself. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" is Youth's natural and unspoken motto.

It was not until the evening of his last Sunday, in Chapel, that suddenly it came on Lycidas, as a dull weight, that this was the end.

Third Chapel at Shrewsbury is always by far the most impressive, perhaps in part because darkness lends a majesty, which is all its own; but also because this service is most fully choral.

on them, but this is a good chance to cheer them once again! Each name was met with a great burst of sound. Russell, as befitted such a useful man, was often mentioned and his name greeted by wild catcalls from his corner, milder tributes from the centre tables. And when finally, as is the custom, the speech ended with the health of Mr. Alton, Lycidas' heart-felt words brought cheer on cheer, and rising on their chairs, the whole House drank the toast with every honour and all conceivable varieties of noise.

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before, who now dreaded that departure—these increased his sadness. Depressing thoughts began to pour in on him. Had he been grateful enough for the enjoyment of what he was now to lose? Had he treated Chapel as a thanksgiving, or as a school fixture, where lateness meant detentions? Had he tried to live the lessons taught him there? His whole life at Shrewsbury seemed, in this morbid instant, to have been a failure. He had thrown good chance after chance away. . . . Hardly trusting himself to think of this, dreading to anticipate the bitterness of parting, he bent his whole mind on the well-known sentences. But how every word, above all every hymn, brought home some memory! He forgot all his old worries, all the little troubles of school life; remembered only its delights, its freedom, remembered that he had to leave it.

When the Head Master, pointing out the need for each member of the School so to order his life as though Shrewsbury's fame depended upon him alone, turned definitely to those who would, in a few days, be leaving the small world of school, it was almost too much. Lycidas remembered how he had heard the like counsel, year after year, carelessly waiting for the final hymn, mind full of holidays: and now its truth came home to him more vivid in the contrast. He held himself

stiffly in his seat, for fear of showing his emotion, and could almost see the difference between the tense figures of those leaving, and the restless stirrings of those to whom Tuesday would bring a charming interlude, and not—the end. It was a relief, when at last after a final hymn, which aroused more memories, the sixth form started filing out, the first boy setting a slow pace, as if reluctant to leave the well-loved scene behind. Never again would he sit in the front, with an unacknowledged pride: his place, in future, would be at the back!

Lycidas had much the same thoughts as he went out. He had at moments, in the last few weeks, looked on to the end, but he had not realized that it would mean this wrench. Slowly, surely, in the six long years, Shrewsbury had weaved her spell round Lycidas, until she formed, and always would form as no other place (except perhaps Oxford) could ever form, a real part of his life. As he walked down the aisle, feeling everybody's eyes upon him, he understood at length the Old Boy's comment, "You lucky little beast, being able to stay here!" But inasmuch as even in the most poignant moments one deludes oneself, he did not call to mind his answer. But as he passed the seat where he had sat at first, and saw the bottom boy, a tiny, broad-collared infant, pathetic in his independence; and noted



the glint of joy in his eyes—a thought of home, no doubt, which even Chapel's sanctity could not repress—then, in one instant, all the years between seemed to roll past Lycidas, and to bristle with lost opportunities, untaken chances. . . . As he stepped beneath the old oak-screen, his soul was heavy with thoughts both of the past and of the future.

Evans joined him outside, as he had joined him for long terms past, but to-night they linked arms, knowing each the other's mind.

Once, as they rounded the master's garden, Evans spoke rather huskily—

“Not a bad sermon to-night.”

And Lycidas, after a pause, swallowed something in his throat, and said—

“Not half bad.”

But after that they walked to Alton's in a silence.

For Lycidas, at any rate, occupation made brooding impossible after call-over. To him it fell, as Head of the House, to go round the studies and find out how much each boy would want as journey money; with a House list in hand, he must mark the sums against the names and take the list again to Mr. Alton. It was not a job that he relished, this term, least of all in his present mournful mood. He would have to speak to many who had not spoken to him since



Photo: W. D. Hegelton

"AS HE STEPPED BENEATH THE OLD OAK-SCREEN, HIS SOUL WAS HEAVY."

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and titles, including "The Hon. Mr. Justice" and "The Hon. Mr. Justice".

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his split with Russell, and he felt that he was in no state for further insult.

But everything went well, though not quite pleasantly. He was apparently regarded not as an individual, but as an instrument, Lycidas reflected; his sworn enemies merely snapped the place and figures out at him, as if ordering buns at the School shop! Only Russell himself and the end studies remained. Russell had said no word to him since the fateful day. He had been persuaded to do the penals (which fact, plus the closing of the Underground, made Lycidas satisfied for his part), but he had sent them by a new boy's hand, not caring to deliver them himself. When Lycidas heard news of him from Evans, it was to learn that he still supported his "*Very well!*" by dark threats of "paying the silly ass out." Lycidas did not tremble so much as dramatic canons might demand at this, but he wished to avoid any further scenes, and rather dreaded entering the study.

Only Mitchell and Russell were there, chatting in a most familiar way. They broke off suddenly and then looked up. Russell quickly glanced down again, and Mitchell said, his voice changing to a colder tone—

"Oh, journey money?"

"Yes; where are you going these hols.?"

As he spoke he realized that they were no longer "hols."

"Right up in the North of Scotland—but I haven't looked it up yet. I will, though, and tell you before ten, or the Dook to-morrow."

"All right. Get some shooting, I suppose? Where are *you* for, this time, Russell?"

It seemed as well to be averagely friendly, because he did not wish to prolong the feud, but also, be it confessed, because he liked to disconcert the sulky Russell.

"Paddington. A sovereign."

Russell rapped it out as to a railway booking-clerk, but Lycidas pretended not to notice.

"Going to be in Town *all* the time, or not?" he asked genially.

"Paddington. A sovereign," said Russell.

Clearly this was no moment for reconciliation.

"Yes, I heard," he answered. "Thank you," and he shut the door. It surprised him to find that he no longer cared very much what Russell did or did not say. Only, feeling as he felt, he would rather have been friends with all at Shrewsbury.

On the whole, although he had grown used to it, his unpopularity in Alton's probably lent strength to Lycidas' depression. Nothing now could make him anxious to leave Shrewsbury,

and this fresh discomfort merely added misery to the last days.

On Monday, final examinations, a final afternoon upon the river, all the usual incidents of school existence, took him from his gloomy thoughts a little; but the customary game of football, played in soft shoes on the cricket field,—a symbol, as it were, of the big ball's triumph,—reminded him that when the season really opened he would take no part in it. When the evening came and those who had won first day began with joyful noise to pack their play-boxes and dash wildly from study to study, their shrill cries and door-slamming seemed to go right through him. They were so glad to get away, and he—— He would never come back again.

The noise grew louder, and he dashed out, to find three small boys, usually quiet, but now drunk with joy, solemnly though not silently dismembering a blotter in number thirteen.

“Whatever do you little idiots think you're playing at?” he cried.

They looked up at him, the fire dying from their eyes, in dumb reproach. Surely he must understand? Why, it was breaking-up!

Lycidas suddenly threw himself back into their place and felt a brute.



"Oh, all right," he said, and went out, awkwardly, a great envy at his heart. Everything produced that feeling. The little beasts did not seem to realize how lucky they were to be coming back again. They ought to be quieter, in pity of those who had to leave.

Lycidas, be it noted, had forgotten his envy of the Old Salopians.

When Tuesday morning came and he awoke at six, to hear everybody stirring, and soon the hollow rumble of cabs along the main approach, his wretchedness grew keener.

It was all as it had always been. The luckless wights who had lost first day turned restlessly on their sleepless beds, reviling those who had gained it; and later, with genial sympathy, stood at the windows and poured leave-taking libations on their heads, as they rushed madly down the passage to their cabs. Outside he could hear the swills going, as he had heard them six long years before. Then the three bells, sounding hollow, as they had on that first day. These are noises which the drowsy school-boy hears not after, say, three terms; but this morning Lycidas was sleepless, and they brought back to him those other days. How happy they had been! So Lycidas, helped by Time, the great idealist!

But there was at least one day more. It was

not like a real day—half the House empty, dormitory altered, Evans gone—but still it was another day. Lycidas had gladly agreed to be one of the three monitors, who have to stay. Work over, he wandered sadly round with Darlington, or by himself, taking a morbid delight in torturing himself by farewell visits to baths, grounds, form-rooms, all the places he had loved; and as happens on these fatuous occasions, often saying farewell to one object several times. It was such a sad, long day, that even when he had seen the Chapel for “the very last time,” he must go back again for want of something else to do. He solemnly lingered by the fives courts, feeling that he would never play again; and the fact that he had never played, did not lessen the misery of parting. Such moments enervate a sense of humour.

The more, too, that Lycidas harped on what he had done, throwing his mind back along the years, the less it seemed. At every point, he saw things that he might have done, but had not. What huge power he was given as monitor; how little he had made of it!

This last day was not a time of pleasure, and Lycidas was almost glad when evening came. He would be the last, probably, to leave the House next morning. He had arranged to go after eleven o'clock, partly because he felt that



warmer. I did what I thought suited you best."

"*Thanks!*—but why do anything?"

"I told you I must."

Russell looked straight at him from his bright dark eyes. "There's no doubt! You'll go where the good boys go, Marsh! I always said you would."

"You always thought me a fool, you mean; and always tried to make the House think so."

The scunch of wheels on gravel heralded a cab at the far passage-end.

"John!" howled Russell. He turned pleasantly to Lycidas. "What were you saying?" he asked; "I forget. Something about being a fool."

Lycidas said nothing, and John hurried past to put the luggage on the cab.

"I always think," said Russell, suddenly, "you ought to go on the stage, or something. You're so beastly dramatic. This is a grand scene, isn't it?"

As he spoke, John cried, "Now, Mr. Russell!"

"I only wanted to make it up," said Lycidas. "It seems rot to carry it on. You may as well shake hands, and say there's no ill-will."

Russell laughed. "'Ill-will!' Good Lord!

But why shake hands? You've made me look a nice ass, these three weeks."

He turned to go. "Well, what of *me?*" asked Lycidas.

Russell looked over his shoulder. "Oh, you *are* one!" he said.

Lycidas stood and watched his rival go down the stone passage, out of his life. He stood there long after the cab had gone.

His prime emotion was amusement. That last remark kept ringing in his ears.

It was so utterly like Russell!

## CHAPTER XX

### EXPLICIT

THE last cab had rumbled off and left Lycidas alone—alone except for Darlington, who was to leave at two o'clock for the North of Ireland by a totally impracticable route. Darlington would be Head of the House next term, and Lycidas gave him a little advice, which he as bitterly resented as had Lycidas that given just a year ago by Kelly. Lycidas suddenly realized that this probably was so, and turned the subject. He was glad of even Darlington, to help pass the ghastly twenty minutes in the empty house, before his cab was due. They stood by the Head Room mantelpiece and talked. A familiar step sounded in the passage (how often, at its beat, had they hurried out their work-books!) and Mr. Alton stood at the door.

“Marsh finished packing?” he asked, with a smile. “Come along, then, I want to have a

chat with you, now everybody's gone." He led the way to the well-known room; but as he said "Sit down!" pointed for the first time to the luxurious arm-chair, often envied in the past. Lycidas, for sentiment's sake, would have preferred the hard, straight-backed chair, familiar as the scene of countless homilies; but feared to offend.

"Well, Marsh," began Mr. Alton, "now we can talk plainly. I've been very pleased with you; you've helped me a great deal, especially during this last year."

"I don't seem to have done anything, sir," said Lycidas, not in mock-modesty, but as sequel to his regretful memories of the last two days.

The House Master smiled genially. "Ah, that's a very healthy illusion; more healthy than a certain new boy's illusion, which I seem to remember—that he could do everything; eh, Marsh? Well, as life draws on, you'll see that you have done a great deal; you have set a good example of duty, which means far more than you imagine."

Lycidas began to shuffle slightly. He would have preferred a jaw to this! Mr. Alton possibly divined it, for to Lycidas' relief he suddenly changed his topic and remarked—

"Now, Marsh, I'm going to ask you an odd question—I always cast convention aside, on this occasion, with boys who are my friends. When you first came, you seemed to me to have some strange ideas, and I wondered whether they came from your good parents, or——"

He paused, as if after a question, and Lycidas answered with a little laugh—

"Oh, I had been reading school stories, sir, to know what school was like!" It was the first time that he had breathed his secret. He had silently shifted the dusty books from study to study; and half-an-hour before, moved by reminiscences, had packed them in his play-box.

"School stories!!" Mr. Alton repeated the words, as though the answer to an enigma which had baffled him for many years.

Lycidas misinterpreted the exclamation. "Oh, I know they're rot, *now*," he said, impulsively, not weighing his expressions.

"Nothing is '*rot*,' Marsh, if you understand it properly; but I dislike these school stories, because they read men's emotions into boyish actions. Boys get hold of them and gain fanciful ideas. You gained the idea, you see, that you could do anything; and, of course, in a few weeks, you came to think you could do

nothing. That has been against you, all your time here; you were always thinking that someone else would do things better than yourself—that Evans should have been Head of the House!”

He looked across at Lycidas with a kind smile, but as he got no retort, went on—

“Well, I’m very glad that I have made you my Head Boy, Marsh; not only because it has done the House good, but because, as I thought, it has done *you* good. These last three weeks, sorry as I am for them, have shown you that, when you want to, you can be strong and stand against every one. You were too diffident, even this term; and this trial was exactly what you needed. I am always saying one thing to these parents, who will take their sons away after three years.” Mr. Alton leant forward, a trick peculiar to him, when about to deliver some pet maxim. “A boy, who leaves a Public School without having known the responsibility of monitorship, loses half its benefit.”

“Yes, sir,” said Lycidas, vaguely embarrassed, and feeling very youthful in his lack of comment.

“I don’t want you to be bitter about what has happened, Marsh. Evans tells me you were hissed in Hall by some stupid fellows. Well, I want you to remember that, once removed

from all the prejudices of the moment, every one will see you were right and respect you. So that the incident has done you no harm, even if it had not made a man of you."

Mr. Alton could no longer fail to notice Lycidas' misery.

"Well, I mustn't bore you," he said, "or you will never come down to see us, and we both hope you'll come very often. But I must say just this: when you get to Oxford, try to cultivate a belief that you *can* do what you *ought* to do. I don't mean you to go back to your old preposterous belief in yourself; self-confidence is quite different from self-conceit. And another thing: both at Oxford and afterwards, remember how much Shrewsbury has done for you, and do all you can for her. I want your School—and of course, your 'Varsity—to be a kind of minor religion with you, ranked by the side of patriotism. Make it a sort of bond, a free-masonry, between you and all those who have been here. Always help Old Salopians, wherever, whoever, they may be, when you are able, and never let any one of them be your enemy."

He looked across at Lycidas, who was gazing as of old at the empty fire-place; and then, as though fearing that he had not understood,

added, "I mean Russell. I should not like you to carry this stupid quarrel any further. Make it up!"

"I asked him to, just now, sir, and he said he bore me no ill-will, but he didn't care to shake hands."

"Ah, silly fellow! I'm disappointed; I thought better of him. He is a good fellow, at bottom, but very wild, born with a strange enmity against authority. I'm not sure that he has been a good influence in the House, but we get boys like him, sometimes, Marsh, and must do our best for them. I dare say he will do credit to Shrewsbury, in spite of everything; he had a great many good qualities. You can be sure, Marsh, if you should ever meet, he will admire you for having stood against him, and know that he was in the wrong. So try to think kindly of him."

"I was always fond of Russell, sir," said Lycidas; and as he stated it, the truth was still a puzzle to him.

Mr. Alton brightened. "Ah, that's right; I'm glad of that. Well, I mustn't keep you any longer. You're thinking me a bore already, but think over what I've said later, and always try to be worthy of Shrewsbury. Try to remember—without being in any sense a



'*prig*'—that some part of the world may judge Shrewsbury through you. Let your every act be worthy of her. The House has been proud of you here; now see that the School shall be proud of you out in the world. And if ever the great spirit of Shrewsbury begins to grow dim in Marsh, he must send us a line and come to pay Mrs. Alton a visit, and revive it! Now, I really will keep you no longer. Good-bye, Marsh, good-bye; I shall miss you next year. Thank you very much for all that you have done."

As the old man took the two hands of Lycidas into his own, and gazed into his eyes, "Thank you, sir!" was all that would come to Lycidas: but it came from his heart. He turned from him and walked towards the door, feeling as he had felt when leaving home, six years ago.

Darlington was waiting patiently outside. "Good Lord!" he said. "What a time you've been! Whatever was the Dook jawing about?"

Lycidas forced back the two tears that had sprung to the corner of his eyes. "Oh, rot of every sort," he answered.

But as he drove out through the School gates and down the steep hill to the bridge, Mr. Alton's words mingled with his memories and summoned endless doubts and questions.

When he reached the toll bridge, and the cab drew up for him to pay, he leant out and gazed his last at the great pile standing out red against the green leaves, up on the hill.

It brought back to him the day when, no less full of doubts and questions, he had first seen that sight—with what different emotions! He remembered how, at that first Bump Supper, he had determined so to act that, when he came back as an Old Boy, he would be cheered. Would he be? Had he indeed been worthy of the House?

The cab jolted on through the rough old-world streets of Shrewsbury: but Lycidas lost his final glance at the town he loved so well. He was busy with his memories. He had been laughed at in his first term, and hissed in his last! What would be his welcome as an Old Boy?

But gradually, steered perhaps by Mr. Alton, his thoughts took an ampler course. He must be worthy, now, of Shrewsbury! He must see that what the School gained from his name should be honour, not disgrace! His thoughts flew on through life—life, all so easy!—to success, valued not for itself nor for himself, but for the sake of Shrewsbury.

As the horse, with every symptom of exhaustion, clattered up the station yard, Lycidas,

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his thoughts wandering to a roseate future in hopes to lose a gloomy present, had resolved that when Fate ordered him to quit the larger school of life, he must leave such a name behind him, that he should win approval from those who would come after.

He was so far the old Lycidas, so far an incarnation of the eternal Soul of Youth, that in all this building of his life, he could find no smallest niche for any thought of failure.

EXPLICIT.

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